MICROCOSM

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Happy Endings

That wimp Raymond Winthorp did not have any qualifications for that job. His college record could not compare to mine—his ideas for that last series were dull and lifeless while mine . . . but let's face it—he's a man. Here I am in 1986 and successful even by Helen Gurley Brown's standards, yet men continue to walk all over me. I compete with men for the same jobs and always walk away with my ideas still in my briefcase. Sometimes I think I could just drive off and leave the rat race.

* * * * *

One morning I woke up and just decided to. There was no real reason. I packed my suitcase to a slight bulge and got in my car and started driving. I was coming into New Hampton, according to a road-sign, before I even noticed I had left Manhatten Island. I pulled over to The Lakeside Cafe and nodded to the attendant to fill the car. The cafe was emptied of customers except for one guy, who was sitting at the end of the counter talking to whom I suspected was his waitress girlfriend. After I got a slice of toast and a cup of coffee, I took a seat by the window.

I looked at the awe-inspiring mountains that were miles away but still huge enough to be seen in some detail. Had I driven hundreds of miles from my home without considering a destination? Maybe the mountains were the reason I came to my senses and finally questioned my actions.

Before I could begin to think about my excursion, I was approached by the guy I had noticed at the counter. Without asking, he scooted in beside me. In a deep, but smooth voice, he asked if there was anything he could help me with. I was shocked by the casualness in his manner. He acted as if it weren't unusual to step into a complete stranger's life and begin to ask questions. Before I could respond, he took out a wrinkled handkerchief and gently wiped underneath my eyes. I saw the smudges of mascara on the handkerchief as he put it back in his pocket, and I felt as if I had unintentionally opened up my life like a book for anyone to read. "That's better," he said.

I hadn't even realized I had been crying. I was overcome with embarrassment, to think I had walked into a cafe telling everyone my life was in shambles. Luckily, this town did not have many people to stare at me and criticize my actions. But this guy was still sitting by me. I'm fine, really, just leave me alone. Don't look at me like I'm going over the edge of a cliff. He smiles with sincere concern. Only Paul Newman has prettier blue eyes.

"Thanks for the handkerchief, but I'm fine, just having a bad day."He said it was too early to be having a bad day and I should go with him. Once again, without thinking about what I was doing I walked from the cafe and he led me to my car. He took the driver's seat and headed down a narrow road with thick, over-hanging trees.

Nothing was said until we reached a stone cottage surrounded by spruce trees. He asked if he could bring in anything for me and I said that I needed my jacket. The air was quite chilly and there was a breeze blowing off a nearby lake. We went inside the cottage where there was a glowing fire, crackling as if it were just built.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Beth," I told him, "and your name?"

"Britain." Somehow I knew he wouldn't have an ordinary name; he wasn't an ordinary guy and this wasn't an ordinary day.

"So do you live around here? I haven't seen you before today."

"No. I'm just going through, I guess."

"Where ya' going?"

"I, uh, I'm, I'm really not sure."

"Somehow I didn't think you were a woman on a mission. I'm not going to intrude on your business or your personal life, but you looked like you had just gone your last mile when I saw you. Are you in any trouble? I'd like to help you if it's not anything illegal."

"I'm not in any trouble." For a few minutes we didn't say anything. We just sat and listened to the fire crackling and felt its warmth. Then he asked again about why I had been crying. For the first time since Britain had sat down beside me in the cafe, I began to think about why I had left my apartment in New York.

Manhatten Island had been my home for the last five years, or at least the place where my mail was sent. In the last few years I had been living in New York City, Los Angeles, Paris, London, Rome . . . In the past few months I had started realizing that I didn't have the luxury of spare time anymore. I had furs, diamonds, and cars, but there was no time to enjoy any of it. My face had become more important than my self. My agent was great at keeping my schedule filled morning to night. Sometimes I would have a shoot in Dallas, early—around five o'clock—then fly to New York for a screen test or interview with a producer for a stage play. The sleeping pills weren't needed anymore because I didn't have time to sleep. I had an obligation to make appearances to my public, to be seen and to "glitter," as my agent would say.

The glitter had turned to dust. While in the hospital, I unconsciously decided to get away from it all. However, I didn't really have the nerve

and I had more appointments to keep and I had to make up for lost time while I was recovering from exhaustion. I had stayed away from the drugs, the martinis, the wines . . . I was determined not to pattern myself, not to follow in the footsteps of my peers. But I had to do something—I had to get away—to remain sane. Now here I am, looking into this stranger's eyes, looking into Britain's eyes.

So I have been here for two days, and he hasn't inquired about my past until this morning. I had just made a nice breakfast, something I hadn't had time to do in months, and I noticed that he was just staring at me as though I were on display, which was unusual for him because he had made me feel so comfortable. The entire meal was ruined by the silence that even the birds outside could not compete with. Finally, I decided to find out what was the matter with him. The rage that came over him when I asked why he was acting so different paralyzed me. Then he started saying how could I think he was acting different when it was me who had been playing charades for three days.

"Why, why are you doing this? You won't even tell me what you're talking about, so how am I supposed to know how to answer you. If it is something I have done; I'm sorry. I'll leave today. I never even planned to come here at all." I don't know how I even managed those few words over the enormous lump in my throat.

"I'll tell you what it's all about. I walk into the drugstore this morning and just what do you think I happen to see on the way out, huh?" Britain wasn't making any sense, as he yelled and paced the floor holding a magazine he had picked up from the counter.

"Well, look here, does this tell you anything?" he said as he threw the magazine in my lap.

As I looked at the cover of the magazine, I suddenly realized the anger Britain had was justified. The November issue of **Harper's** had come out and I was on the cover. "I forgot it was coming out this month. I'm sorry—I—I really hadn't even thought to tell you. I'm a model. Please let me explain." I felt explaining probably wouldn't do any good at all. Britain was angry, and I could see he was also hurt.

"How could you come into my house like a lost little puppy and carry on like you were an ordinary passer-by on to the next town, when you are a big model and who knows what else. You didn't care, did you? You didn't even give it a second thought about what you made me look like. I stand here and let a famous model walk right in front of me and don't even notice. Do you know how deceiving that is?"

"Britain, I didn't know where to start. I've messed things up so bad and I didn't even realize I was doing it. I've just spent the best two days with a person who has been so wonderful and kind, and the whole time

I refused to admit that I was anybody worth mentioning. I didn't want you to start thinking you should act a certain way because you were so natural. I guess I forced myself to forget what was bothering me in order to cope with it, and I'm really sorry that I've used you as a part of it."

Britain just stared straight ahead for what seemed like forever before he finally looked at me, and when he did, I started crying. He came and sat next to me and put his arms around me as he gently stroked my hair. Then in a comforting tone he said, "Beth, I don't know anything about you. I thought I did, but now I feel like a fool. Sure I know you like to take walks and go out on the lake. I even know about your family in Savannah. Yet, I have no explanation of why you have come out here all of a sudden, with a frown and a sad story. I've had a great time with you. I think you and I both know there's something good between us, or maybe you're an actress too. No wait, I'm sorry; I don't mean that. But we have got to talk if you think we should start over. Or do you want to pack and get out of here?"

Instantly I told Britain that I felt we should talk and I began pouring out the details beginning with the first interview I had with a local department store in Savannah. We talked endlessly over nothing but me and my career. Britain was interested in everything I had to say about the hectic schedules and the constant pressures of modeling. He was sympathetic and he squeezed my hand when I was close to tears.

The fire had dwindled to almost nothing when he finally said he understood what I had been going through. I watched him as he got up to put logs on the fire. Kneeling beside him I felt that now everything was wonderful again. Britain laid me down beside him and pulled an afghan from the sofa, spread it over us, and then rested his hand on my stomach. The fire crackled; I could hear him breathing and I felt his pulse on my stomach. Outside the air was cold and damp, the patio doors were foggy, blurring my vision to anything beyond Britain's boundaries.

* * * * *

As the saying goes, it is okay to be optimistic as long as you are realistic! What guy is going to see any girl with mascara running under her eyes and want to sit by her? The truth is: Britain saw Beth's car parked outside and dollar signs kicked him off the bar stool. All of a sudden the sweet little waitress he was talking to turned to a pillar of salt and he never looked back. And, of course, he took the driver's seat. What male would pass up the opportunity to hot rod a Ferrari on a winding mountain road?

Britain was really quick to find out if Beth was in on anything illegal; worried? wanted to help? No, he was just wondering if it was something he could get in on.

But I'm not going to condemn Britain because I certainly do not condone Beth's actions. Now I am a real American female, unlike the hopefully fictitious Beth. I am sure a real female would run away from a mega-successful modeling or acting career to hang out with a mountain man. It is an accomplishment for women to just be successful at living in New York City, forget worrying about not having spare time anymore. My retired grandparents say they don't have any spare time anymore.

Yes, Beth's face should have been smushed or taken off and put on some pitifully grateful Phyllis Diller if she didn't want it to "glitter."

But anyway, Britain blew up because Beth tried to see if Britain liked her for her image or her "intellectual conversation." In reality, he was only hurt because he hadn't been able to tell the guys at work that his new roomie was a famous model, and it didn't help matters that Beth was on the cover of **Harper's** and not **Playboy.**

Well, Britain cuts her down a few times and makes her realize she was wrong so that he can still claim his manhood. And guess what? Beth apologizes to him and he feels like a stud, the fire really does crackle, and you believe it is happily ever after.

* * * * *

Well, of course, it is. Every man wants to walk down the aisle with Barbie. She is the only female in America that is totally malibu, and the only thing between her ears is the other ends of her hair.

To tell the truth, does a guy really expect to marry one of the girls in those fashion magazines? He might as well marry a mannequin because they are the only girls who can hold that glamorous look all of the time.

All of the Britains get a little too choicy after they are filled with ideas of grandeur as they flip through magazines, and sit in theatres while compiling a list of requirements for their fairytale companions. The females on those glossy pages and huge screens just do not exist.

As intelligent citizens of the real American female sect, are we not entitled to be so extremely choicy ourselves? My answer is yes. But are we going to look for Ken? No. Barbie has a Corvette, a Palamino pony, a townhouse, a luxury liner, and a country cottage. But Ken has only a seven-piece wardrobe, hairbrush, and tennis racket included. And women know he has a plastic personality.

Now put the female in her ideal role. She goes to school eighteen years, graduates Harvard with honors, works her way up the corporate ladder, and then upon becoming executive chairperson she hires a man as her personal secretary, complete with stenographer's pad and pen set. Thus, the ultimate success story.

* * * * *

About the other success story—Beth and Britain. It really was happily ever after and I do not want to distort any American Dream. Britain and Beth are still living in the cottage surrounded by spruce trees. Beth relinquished her modeling career at Britain's request and decided to establish a Mountain Real Estate Corporation. As the working day ends, Beth drives home and is comforted to find as usual Britain has cleaned the home and prepared an elegant dinner. Eagerly he runs to her and takes her briefcase and trades her heels for cozy slippers. While telling Beth of the funny little things that happened during the day, Britain sets the table. Beth is pleased to hear that Britain was within one hundred dollars of the showcase showdown on **The Price Is Right.** Also, Britain is still dismayed at how Victoria could be cheating behind Nick's back on his favorite soap opera. Beth nods a sly smile and sits down to dinner.

* * * * *

Sometimes we just cannot choose our own fate. After months of research I went into the job interview with my usual confidence. And this time I got the job. However, it seems the insufferable Raymond Winthorp is going to be my new employer. After months of competing with him I find now I will be working closely with him and he will give me the orders that I have to execute with good will. I think I just stepped on a rotten rung in that corporate ladder. Gloria Steinem, what do I do now?

Antony and Cleopatra, Samson and Delilah: fine examples of what a little perseverance can bring from a hopeless situation. And I was right. It worked for me too; only better than I could ever have imagined. Once I walked back up the aisle with Raymond the chips fell in all the right places, including the one I knocked off Raymond's shoulder. Now he sits across from my desk, five-feet long, solid oak, with hand-carved Gothic trimming, and takes notes as I relax in my executive high-gloss leather with Swiss upholstering. And he fixes my coffee just the way I like it — perfect. That's the way I like everything — perfect. For that

reason I just had to do something to Beth and Britain's story. I blew up when I first read that one. How I do love those happy endings.

"Did you get that, Raymond, dear? **Endings**, with an **s**, as in this one."

Glenda Gill

Nickie's Story

We all watched the news the night they showed Nickie's picture; the little girl in a red plaid dress with a shy smile. Our favorite news personalities sat at the desk in front of Nickie's picture, or stood in front of the mall with microphones in their hands and told us that Nickie's mother had reported her two-year-old missing while shopping at a store inside the mall. We all sat in our living rooms or at our dinner tables; and through the media we saw Nickie's grandmother cry; we heard her mother's voice say that she hoped whoever had her little girl would return her safely.

By the 10 p.m. report we were beginning to get the details. The search began. Nickie's divorced Mom went all over town, putting up pictures of her missing child on the glass doors of local businesses and soliciting the help of the merchants. Law officers began a diligent search; questioning mall employees and shoppers, putting out all-point bulletins. The little girl was last seen wearing a blue dress. Reward money was offered to anyone with the slightest hint of what had happened to Nickie. The news reporters relayed the message for anyone having any information to come forward. While all over Mississippi, people watched and waited; teachers, businessmen, housewives, preachers, and factory workers remembered Nickie even after the news went off; and within their busy days they lifted up prayers for her safe return.

After Nickie's disappearance on Friday, the reporters said a witness came forward on Saturday to describe two men seen putting a little girl into an El Camino in front of the mall.

The search went on. Nickie's mother and grandmother continued to come on T.V. and plead for her return. The police drew sketches of the suspects and scanned the streets of the city for them. The reward money increased as businessmen and others continued to pitch in. The reporters kept asking questions. And all over Mississippi everyone wondered what had happened. Would Nickie ever be found? Or was she destined to only become another milk-carton child; forever fixed on the paper container, in hopes that somewhere, someday, someone would recognize her bright pretty eyes, her tiny nose, or that shy smile glazed across her small lips.

On Sunday morning the county sheriff, who had promised us all on Friday that he would do everything he could to find Nickie, stood before us to tell us that he had.

At 10:15 that clear Sunday morning authorities had found the body of the sought for two-year-old, still wearing her tiny blue dress and black shoes, in a canal of the river, just outside the city.

The search was over. We saw the men carry Nickie's lifeless little body out of the murky waters of the canal.

By Sunday afternoon the sheriff had arrested a murder suspect. A woman had been spotted by fishermen, driving to the canal with the child on Friday. The woman was Nickie's mother.

By Sunday night news time she had confessed to the murder of her two-year-old daughter. The men in the El Camino were only a mischance guess. She herself had driven to the canal; thrown the child into the water. Then she had driven directly to the mall, where she had reported Nickie missing, convincing us all that she hoped whoever had her child would return her safely, wrenching our sympathies, misleading the law officers. All the while she knew where Nickie was. At the bottom of a river. Where she had put her.

The whole heart of Mississippi was filled with grief and disbelief. We stared in shock at the woman who now dodged reporters and cameras with a purse over her face as police took her from place to place; the same woman that we had felt sorry for because her child was taken, the same woman that had begged for her safe return.

Background information the newscast had obtained told us that the woman was divorced, with custody of the only child. Nickie had a slight hearing disability. Her twenty-year-old mom said that she killed her daughter because she "just couldn't cope anymore."

All over the state mothers clung to their own children in disbelief in front of the television sets that Sunday. On Friday they had begun to hold their children tighter; unable to bear the thought of someone taking them. They were afraid to go out shopping, afraid to let their children play outside. Now there was only shock, for Nickie's murderer was after all, the very one with whom God had entrusted her life. And they couldn't begin to imagine why she did it, how she could have done it. There were so many questions that the news didn't answer.

The coroner told us that the victim was alive when thrown into the water; death was by drowning. There was so much that the television didn't show, but the mothers could see. They could almost see Nickie, probably whimpering and crying a little as her mother sentenced her to death and threw her off that cliff. They could almost feel her suffer as she must have struggled with her small limbs against the cold water and tried desperately to breathe in air. But all that would come in was the cold, wet water. And how long that struggle must have gone on; until there was no breath left in Nickie; until the river had won. Then

they all shuddered, and turned off the television sets.

Finally, Nickie's funeral. Hundreds of mourners turned out, and the television viewers came too, you might say. The ones who were there in person were a sorted lot; some who knew her and grieved the loss, some who didn't know her and still grieved who came as if to say, "I'm sorry this happened to you, Nickie, and I still don't understand why." The cameras were there too; they brought us the feeling of being there. The pictures of the graveyard were clear and real, maybe even a little too real. We saw the familiar green tent, yet it didn't seem to shelter anyone from anything. We saw black, and the colors mingle as the troop of mourners moved to and from the graveside. The high heels of the women sunk into the ground and the shiny black shoes of the men collected dust as they walked cautiously among the graves. We saw Nickie's flowers, beautiful bouquets in the colors of rainbows that didn't make up for even one of Nickie's smiles. There would be no more pictures of her on the news. Our last glimpse of Nickie was of her tiny white coffin being lowered into the dirt, a picture of death: wasteful, useless, untimely.

And after a newscast like that at least one person must wonder if Nickie lies there in her grave at night, lifeless, or if her soul cries in her deep sleep; if she cries out for all the dreams she didn't have, all the knowledge she didn't learn, and all the love that was never returned to her. The reporters didn't tell us that. They just showed Nickie being lowered into the grave and let us guess the rest.

Now when we turn on our sets, all we see is Nickie's mother. She is different now, and we can see it when she is magnified by the cameras and audio equipment. She's not the same sly murderess that cleverly lied to us all. She cries a lot now. She covers her face. She clings to the sheriff to protect her from the crowds. And she tells her story over and over, to whoever makes her. The truth now is that the cold, calculating killer is shattered into a million pieces, and scattered . . . scattered all over the state to be picked through by the lawyers, judges, policemen, and reporters. But all the state's doctors and all the state's lawyers can't put Nickie's mother back together again.

However, she'll be all right. She is protected by this great state and by this great nation; by our court system's keen sense of fairness; and by our constitution, written in freedom by our forefathers. She will not be handled too roughly by the sheriff or the deputies; the guards will make sure she is safe and has plenty to eat, and has medical treatment if she needs so: those are the rules. And in the courtroom the people will treat her with respect . . . the judge will listen to her with sympathy to some degree, and make sure that the attorneys don't say anything to intimidate her. All the jurors will consider her case with

fairness, unbiased and unprejudiced. If she cannot afford a defense attorney, then the government will pay for one for her. The trial will be moved to another city if necessary. Those are her rights, rights given to her by God and the law. We know that by now. We've read it in books. We've seen it in action on the news. We believe in it too; we hold it sacred to our hearts and carry it out with American pride.

As the cameras are manned outside the courtroom, keeping up with the trial and all the evidence, and all the rights, all our thoughts are caught up in justice and rights of the prosecuted.

Oh . . . but there was just one more thing . . . What about Nickie? What are her rights? She is dead, that's true. She had rights when she was alive, her right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But they were washed away on a technicality—her death. The system stopped considering Nickie when she took her last breath. They took on her mother's rights instead. Our news media reflect our concern for all efforts of fairness in a murderer's trial. But what is fair about a two-year-old being murdered by her mother, and that same mother having the option of pleading insanity and walking the streets or even standing in front of the whole world saying, "Yes, I did it. I meant to," and still walking free in a few months? Nickie really wouldn't have minded dying, if it meant that something would be done to protect others like her; if it meant results that would make for less children's bodies, less milk-carton children; no, Nickie probably would have given her life freely for that. And we the viewers of this story can't help but ask: How in God's name can we call this the land of equal opportunity, when a healthy two-year-old will never fly a kite, will never dream of going to college, will never ride in a plane, or cook a meal, or fall in love; because she was murdered by her mother, in a place and a time when she is allowed to get away with it. Nickie's mother traded in her child's opportunities to become a news item and a court case that will most probably be forgotten in a short time. Nickie's death doesn't mean there can't be justice for the criminal; there must be. But somewhere, anywhere out there, is there any justice for Nickie?

Melissa Lewis

Men and Housework

Men have better things to do with their time than perform household tasks. Their hours and minutes are totally occupied with important matters. They spend hours dressed in forest colors with caps or vests of bright orange and invade Mississippi forests and fields in desperate search of ferocious wild animals. Armed with Brownings and Remingtons, men stalk savage squirrels, fierce rabbits, and violent deer in an avid attempt to rid our soil of these brutal creatures.

Without men, our ponds, lakes, and waterways would be teeming with fish. American men may not be found in the backyard raking leaves, but they can be found in boats, on creekbanks, and on pond dams ridding our water of those harmful creatures. Men have gleaned immense patience sitting still with wooden or plasticized sticks held firmly in their hands, watching a ball bobbing on a string tied to the end of the stick. Yet these same hands are too busy to grasp the handles of a lawnmower.

Men spend large segments of time sitting in front of a television set watching other men struggling for the possession of an oddly shaped leather ball. During this on-screen conflict, some men get excited and throw socks, pillows, and assorted items unfortunate enough to be nearby. And, still, men don't have time to throw their dirty clothes in the hamper . . . it's so much easier for them to drop them where they are.

Men also watch televised games featuring men wearing knickers and large leather gloves. They strike at an innocent white ball with an evil-looking stick and send it thumping across the ground, whistling through the air, or they throw it to each other at such incredible speeds that it makes a slapping sound as it is caught in a glove. By the time men watch all these games on television, their eyes are too tired to concentrate on fixing the clogged kitchen drain; they smugly tell their wives to call the liquid plumber.

Men are found in yards, in parking lots, and on roadsides passing time with each other. They stand at the back of a pickup with one foot propped on the bumper, and they spit. Men enjoy their hours spent in this manner, and spitting. They speak of cattle prices, the best ball teams (any sport, any category . . . high school, college, pro, pony league), fertilizer, hay and rye grass fields . . . and they spit. Is it any wonder men have no time to trim hedges or vacuum floors? They're too busy spitting.

Men seem to have a habit of acting tired to keep away from

household tasks. Their shoulders sag forward, their eyes sink into their heads, and they groan loudly and soulfully as they lower their bodies slowly into the nearest comfortable chair.

Men have various health problems that prevent them from any work in (or around) the house. At the mention of washing the dog, the toe that was stumped three years ago starts to hurt. What about the "tennis elbow" in men who never held a racquet in their lives have? Office workers and executives just cannot wash dishes. Their eyes widen in agony as they slowly reveal the latest papercut or hangnail.

Although men don't have time to perform household tasks, they always have time to create them. Men will usually leave a shower curtain open. They don't have to scrub the mildew off it, so they leave it open. They also **forget** to lift the toilet lid up (that's no fun at all, is it ladies?). They are extremely inaccurate with their aim and splatter the toilet seat, thereby creating another household task (not to mention what happens if the splatter goes unnoticed).

Men can also be untidy individuals. Other than scattering clothes, they leave their socks in their shoes and wonder why there are no clean socks in their dresser drawer. Have you ever noticed how they like to pile things up? On the coffee table, on the end table, on the dresser and on the chest-of-drawers. Men don't like to put things back where they found them, but don't use something of theirs and not put it back! They will let garbage fall on the floor before emptying a full can. They'll let mold grow in the refrigerator and think it's a new type of topping. They'll let soap scum accumulate in the bathtub until the size of the tub has decreased.

Men are usually too busy hunting or fishing or spitting or doing nothing to do anything around the house. All kidding aside, not all men are like the ones described here. Some men are thoughtful, clean and conscious of the appearance of their home. My hat goes off to you; if you are such a man . . . my number is 555-LAZY.

Karen Wolfrum

Why Write?

What drives a writer
To fill pages of paper
With maps to the secrets
Of his mind?

Slightly braver
Than the average human,
His hiding places
Are open to the public.

Why would someone
give of himself
In a way that isn't required
Or even expected.

Because,
With the need for expression,
Comes the need
To share.
A writer represents
The dreamer
And designer
In every human.

He is an artist
Of the mind
Who uses words to create
An image of life.

He understands
The mental bonds
That the world
Fights to keep hidden
But never broken.

Stacey Reid

I. Discovery

FREE VERSE

Poetry is

Words

That have been . . .

liberated.

II. Essay

The Hunter

Stepping outside on a cold winter morning, and
cradling his gun, the hunter crunches through the frozen field
down the hill to the stream winding through the trees.
Fording the stream on stepping stones,
Grabbing the icy limbs of an oak for security—
(its branches clink together and tinkle like chimes)
he made it.
Then on through the woods to the meadow
where the faint, rosy glow above the treetops
heralds the approaching dawn.
Crouched at field's edge, he waits,
(while all around the sounds of morning stir).
Suddenly the silhouette of a flapping bird,
dark against the pale sky, appears.

The hunter's shoulder hosts the gunstock firm.
Death-cold gunmetal on flesh, he
tracks the solitary figure through the heavens.
Heart thumping and muscles tense
(in anticipation of the recoil),
he fingers the trigger
and contemplates squeezing.
The waterfowl flies on, and is soon lost to sight.
Slowly the hunter lowers the barrel and smiles.

The wind blows and stirs the powdery snow
(some clings to his eyelashes and dusts his hair).
Turning slowly, the hunter retraces his tracks toward home,
where there will be a light in the window
and a fire in the hearth.

III. Meditation (abstraction)

wOrds liKe Raln

Words. Ona page, splattered like paint
On a CaNvas, smeareD; no meaning,
ReallY—No grAmmaR either
Or form—but LoTs of sTyle; They
fal| like pEnniEs. in A jar—adull thud
Like sound with a ring A
Gunshot and its echO (cho) Or
Aquestion—no reply . . .
No meaning Really just sounds that talk to
Your inner voice Speaking but making nO sense So that just when you think that maybe you—
Understand? They
fal| aGain and a
GENESIS
of concentric thoughts radiate outward with unfeeling arms
to distant shores of understanding always, invariably, just beyond reach . . .
Like a sEntence no verb. Like abeginning but no

Chris Nesmith

Shadows

The shadow of fear descends,
gripping me in its claws,
tearing my future into nothingness,
clutching my heart,
ripping screams from my mind.

The shadow of fear descends,
smiling in my terror,
laughing in my pain,
rejoicing in my tears.

The shadow of fear descends,
cringing before my hope,
withering before my dream,
bowing before my prayer.

The shadow of fear ascends.

And the shadow of death descends,
darkening my mind,
dimming the light in my eyes,
cradling my soul,
gently floating to a brighter light.

Karen Wolfrum

Practice Makes Perfect

Off-key twangs and tired chords
Ring from misplaced fingers
On a keyboard,
An awkward young music student
Practices her daily music lesson
In a stuffy side room.

Stray strands of hair
Cling to her damp forehead
As she struggles to concentrate.
The black notes swim in a blurr
As her untrained eyes try to focus
On confusing sharps and flats.

Watch her cringe over a missed note,
Feel her sense of defeat.
Uncertainty weakens her enthusiasm.
Struggling for perfection,
Reaching for higher goals,
She learns with each mistake.

Stacey Reid

I Must Walk My Own Way

I must walk my own way
And find a place for me.
Please, don't ask me if I'll stay.

I go to seek a place to lay
My head upon my knee.
I must walk my own way.

My feet may often go astray
Looking for a Sycamore tree.
Please, don't ask me if I'll stay.

There is a place for me to pray
For guidance, faithfully.
I must walk my own way.

Our eyes may touch one golden day . . .
Under stars beside the sea,
But, please, don't ask me if I'll stay.

The dawn and I must go away,
Still searching to be free.
I must walk my own way.
Please, don't ask me if I'll stay.

Karen Wolfrum

Cold, Silent Night

Night was closing in on the city and silence loomed in the air like the clouds of a threatening storm. The sky, gray the entire day, darkened rapidly and the chillness of the night crept overland. Slowly, one by one, headlights blinked on along the freeway until it resembled two chains of Christmas lights, one red and one white. David checked his dashboard and found his fuel was alarmingly low. He feared he would have to stop here in the city before continuing home.

He turned to Alan who was gazing intently out of the windshield at the road ahead. "We'll stop here to get gas before we get on the interstate," he told him, tapping him on the leg. Alan turned his head and nodded, then returned to his vigil in the passenger seat.

David and Alan lived a block apart in their hometown, and, although they attended different schools while they were growing up, they were close friends. They both went to the same college now, but they did not have a class together and they roomed in different dorm halls. David and Alan often drove to school together, and now they were both going home for Christmas.

David guided his car down the freeway effortlessly, almost as if the machine maneuvered itself. When he came to the exit ramp that led downtown, he pulled the wheel suddenly over and headed the car down the concrete pathway. He almost passed the exit opting to rely on what gas they had left and fill up somewhere along the interstate; but he decided against it at the very moment as they passed the ramp; and now they were heading down the ramp toward the run-down side of town, almost as if they had no choice.

The sky was black now and it began to get cooler as the earth turned away from the sun. The streetlights flickered and came to life like nocturnal creatures arising for the night and bathed the street and adjacent buildings in their weird, artificial orange light.

The car moved silently down the street. The only sound was the low strains of music playing over the radio. David hadn't noticed the music until he saw the radio was on; and then he couldn't help but hear it. He turned it off and glanced over at Alan who was leaning against the window, producing a patch of fog on the glass as he studied the people outside, talking and running, but making no sound. He looked at David, who smiled. Alan returned the smile, feeling really good about going home and eager to get out of the bleak town. Both boys obviously felt the same gratitude and peace on this cold, silent night; no words were needed.

David pulled up into a small gas station that was brightly lit—blindingly lit, he thought — and drew up beside the pumps. Greeted by a cold, stiff wind, they opened their doors and stepped out.

David handed Alan a five-dollar bill and told him to pay the attendant for the gas. Alan went into the store where the clerk was reclining in a chair intently watching a TV show. Alan, not wishing to disturb him, handed the clerk the money and left. Without removing his gaze from the screen, the clerk took the money, deposited it in the cash register, and set the pump for five dollars. Then he settled back into his chair, murmuring an unheard thank-you as Alan left.

Alan then realized he was hungry and waved to David that he was going to the small grill behind the store. David nodded, leaning against the car watching the pump as the digits signifying money easily outdistanced the gallons.

Bill's Eats did not promise to be a culinary adventure, but Alan figured a burger here was good as one anywhere. Bill's lay right behind the store, but contrasted it to an extreme. Bill's was a small, dimly-lit place and the store was brightly lit; and where the store at least tried to appear clean, Bill (whoever he was) apparently did not care about cleanliness.

Alan entered the small building, no more than a room, and every pair of eyes turned to look at him and every mouth closed as each person silently passed judgement. When they decided that the visitor posed no threat, they returned to whatever they had been doing before. Alan walked to the bar in surprise. From the outside Bill's had looked deserted, but actually it was quite crowded.

Behind the bar was a small, wiry man of about thirty with bloodshot eyes and nervous hands. He was constantly wiping a seemingly clean glass with a grimy rag and scanning the room around him. He made no attempt to take Alan's order; and, although the place was named "Eats" no one appeared to be eating anything. Confused, Alan turned around and surveyed the groups of people seated at the tables. At one table directly opposite him was a quartet of two men and two women talking. Both of the men had shades on, although it was very dark inside, and both women had thin, tight skirts on, although it was near freezing outside. One of the men glanced around the room and handed the woman across from him a plastic bag beneath the table, and although he wasn't sure, Alan thought the bag contained a syringe. Alan decided then against eating at all. He got up to leave and decided to use the bathroom while he and David were stopped. He walked from the bar to the bathroom, creating swirls of smoke in the air, and every pair of eyes followed him once more.

Outside David finished filling the car and pulled it around to the other side of the store. He walked back around and bought a pack of gum. It was then he noticed the police cars driving by and lining the street across the lot. Several unmarked cars pulled up near the restaurant; still others went around where David had just parked the car.

"What's going on?" David asked the clerk, putting a stick of gum in his mouth. The clerk interrupted his stare at the television screen to look. "I don't know," he said rising to his feet, stretching. "But I hope it ain't trouble." David nodded in agreement. "Probably got something to do with that greasy little place back of the store," he said. David rushed out of the door, leaving the bewildered clerk inside, and ran around to Bill's. Several people were standing outside.

"You there!" one of them said, as another grabbed David. "Where are you going?"

"One of my friends is inside; he—"

The man cut him off. "Shut up and step back," he said, "or you'll screw everything up!" He motioned to someone across the street, but David could see no one there. Suddenly about ten men materialized and moved across the street and were invisible again, hiding behind cars and light poles. "Is Horen inside?" the man asked. Someone said that he was. Their voices were grave, resolute—anticipating. David felt the need to say something to them, but was afraid to speak out.

They were all fairly large men, dressed much like the people inside; but it was easy to see their garb was fake—not real grease and dirt. These men were obviously policemen. "We'll wait on Horen's signal," the head man said. A couple of greasy-haired boys strolled up, their faces pale and almost anemic-looking. They slowed when they saw the group, including David who was still being held, but decided this was nothing unusual and entered Bill's.

"My friend may get hurt," David said, his voice shaking. "He hasn't done anything—"

"Shut up!" the man said, glancing up at Bill's and then glaring at David. "He won't be hurt. We can't blow this now."

Just then a man emerged from the door, lit a cigarette and immediately dropped it to the ground, snuffing it out with his toe. Then he went back inside.

"Alright, that's it," the policeman said softly. "Let's go. And you get out of here," he said to David. The man released David and he took a few steps back. The head man turned and signalled once more; an entire mob silently approached the building. Dismayed, David could only watch.

When Alan emerged from the bathroom several men pushed him against the wall in their rush to leave. There seemed to be some kind of commotion in the front part of the restaurant—soon an entire mob was scrambling to get out of a small kitchen door in the back. Alan tried to see what was going on, but his view was obstructed by all the people and all the smoke. He did, however, glimpse a few men brandishing guns. Fear seized his senses, and he slipped out the back door with the crowd.

When he emerged, he was in a small fenced in area, littered with boxes and garbage. He looked for a way to get to David or the car, but the only way out was through a gate in the back. He followed the others through it.

David stood outside the restaurant where a mass of people had assembled, as if magnetized and fused together. He watched intently for Alan as the policemen marched the denizens of the restaurant out. Many had their hands lifted over their heads and were shoved into waiting police cars. Others were questioned and released, but Alan was not among any of them.

David stood nervously, a passive observer of the scene around him, yet feeling he was at the center of it all. He looked about for the policeman in charge and found him in the middle of a small group. David approached him cautiously, thinking about what he should say, when another officer, dressed like a gang member, ran up to the chief and reported that a few people had apparently escaped out the back, but that most had been captured. David walked closer to the men.

"Most have been captured?" the chief asked. "Where are the others?" David waited intently for the answer. The officer pointed to the back of the restaurant, toward some tall apartment buildings silhouetted against the starry sky.

"That way, I think," the officer said. David turned and ran off toward the apartments, zigzagging his way through the thinning crowd.

Alan halted in the shadow of one of the tall buildings and bent over, resting on his knees. He turned around to assess the situation at the restaurant from the safety of his distance from it, and saw a man in blue jeans and an old coat running up the hill after him. When the man saw Alan he started shouting something to him and held his gun up in the

air. Horrified, Alan turned down the dark street and began to run, mindless of intention or direction.

David ran into the open lot behind the restaurant, scanned its breadth, and saw the man with the gun running down the street. David shouted at the man, but his voice didn't carry across the lot. He began to give chase himself, praying this officer would somehow lead him to Alan.

The icy night air was painful to breathe and it burned Alan's throat like fire. His feet felt frozen, and it seemed as if pounding them on the concrete would break them like fragile glass. He glanced over his shoulder; the crazed man followed behind, holding the gun ahead of him. Alan's heart raced ahead.

Alan considered stopping and reasoning with this man; perhaps surrendering to him his money, his watch—everything. But how does one reason with a man chasing you with a gun? he thought. How much reason exists in one when panic sends adrenalin flowing through his body and fear gnaws at his stomach like some beast devouring carrion?

Alan realized he needed to seek out somebody—anybody, but the street was empty and silent. He felt vulnerable on the deserted street and he turned into an alley into a small parking lot littered with trash and encompassed by several other buildings. He crossed the dark lot and entered the apartment on the other side.

The officer paced himself behind Alan, waiting to see who would tire first. If he made his move too soon and the kid was a good runner, he could forget it; but if the kid tired quickly, he would have him.

His feet pounded on the unyielding concrete. If only these boots weren't so heavy, he thought. He was wary of the kid, even though he appeared to be only a scared, young boy. Looks can be deceiving, he knew. Many times these pushers are young, rich kids—many times they will use a gun if they are cornered and panic. He thought of his wife at home—she would be worrying about him; his young daughter would be watching TV. He wasn't going to risk his life to capture this kid.

But he wasn't going to let him get away, either.

"Hold it, kid!" he shouted as Alan turned into the alley, but he never slowed his pace or turned around. The officer then realized this one wouldn't be so easy.

David lost the man in the darkness and slowed his gait to a jog. He soon stopped running altogether. The cold air was biting his hands, and he drew his coat around his neck and stuffed his hands into his

pockets. Someone approached down the sidewalk, and he anticipated Alan emerging from the dark. Hope flooded over him for a moment but was gone when a strange man walked into the streetlight's glow. That weird orange glow. He glanced at David curiously and walked on: a face David had never seen before and probably never would see again.

David began to walk down the street, reasoning as he went; he decided Alan would try eventually to get back to the car. But what if he couldn't find it? What if he got lost in this large city? He felt he was to blame for whatever happened to Alan. He had acted almost as Alan's older brother since they were small children. He couldn't think of facing Alan's parents should anything happen to him.

Alan ran up the stairs of the apartment building, spiraling up the staircase to the top. He slipped once and scraped his shin but bounded the steps quickly until he got to the top floor. He tried the door that led into the hallway. It wouldn't open. Desperately he looked around on the landing for an alternate escape route, but there was none. The only way out was down. He leaned over the rail and peered down the stairwell. The officer's eyes and his locked. An expression passed over the man's face, but was quickly gone. Was it elation? Was it malice? Alan couldn't tell; what ever it was, it scared him. He began to look for a means to defend himself. There was only a plastic garbage can on the landing. He knew that would not do. Alan could sense the man's approach. He tried the door once more, but it held fast. His hands began to shake—his palms were wet with sweat. He sat down by the door and covered his head.

The officer ascended the steps slowly, his gun held in front. He wondered what the kid was up to—it was much too quiet. He listened for any sounds that might give him a clue. There was only silence, save for his own heart beating. He began to climb the stairs once more.

"OK, come out where I can see you," he called out—his voice echoed down the stairs. "Slowly," he added. There was no response. He began to wonder if the boy had gotten away—only pretended to be trapped. Could he have been that smart? the officer wondered. He climbed the last flight of stairs quickly.

The kid sat by the door, his face hidden by his arms. He apparently hadn't seen him yet. He could be hiding a gun still, the officer thought. He raised his gun again, silently chastising himself for being momentarily off guard.

Suddenly the door opened, and a fat lady in a night gown holding a furry white cat walked out. She seemed surprised to see someone on the landing, and when she saw the officer with his gun, she screamed hoarsely, dropping the cat to the floor. Alan jerked his head up quickly when the door opened and fled into the hallway. He ran down the hall toward the door at the other end.

The woman startled the officer, paralyzing him for a moment; he recovered in time to be in the hall before Alan could get out. "Stop!" he yelled. "I'm a policeman!" Alan never turned his head. "I'll shoot!" he threatened, although it was a bluff. Still, the kid couldn't know that, and he seemed to ignore my warnings, he thought. As Alan exited the hall through the door, the officer decided there would be no more.

David ran down the sidewalk—not knowing why but realizing he had to keep moving. Time moved too slowly when he stood still. His legs burned, his side ached, but he kept on running. Coming to an intersection, David turned the corner, reasoning that if Alan had come this way, he would not have crossed the street. The wind stung his face and eyes, making him blink frequently. It whipped in his ears, but he neither heard nor felt anything. He continued running blindly down the street.

Alan opened the door on the bottom floor and ran out into the street in full stride. He was on a small street that led to what appeared to be a loading zone connecting the backs of several small stores. Alan headed for the street, glancing quickly back over his shoulder. He saw the gunman burst out of the door and take aim. Before he could fire Alan ducked into a small alley and confronted a ten-foot high wooden wall, barring his passage.

He looked about him for a way to climb over, perceiving every possible option with lightning speed. He pulled a garbage can over beneath the fire escape and climbed onto it. He stretched up for the rail and seized the cold steel. The garbage can tipped over beneath him and his weight was suddenly on his hands; his knuckles turned white. How easy it would be just to let go, he thought. But instead he climbed the rail, swung his leg over it and stood upright. The effort to climb the fire escape had drained nearly all of his energy; he could ascend the steps only with the aid of the rail.

The officer entered the alley with caution, as he was taught to do, and scanned the area before him. There was no kid, and no escape

from the alley, except over the wall—which was unlikely. Then he noticed the tipped garbage can and realized he may have gotten away after all. He was about to holster his gun and concede defeat when he heard a noise above him. Looking up, he saw the kid clumsily climbing the fire escape rather noisily. The man ran around to the back of the building and went inside, taking the stairs two at a time.

David ceased his running and sat down on a set of steps, exhausted. He sucked air into his raw lungs and hung his head. He was sweating and his heart felt as if it leapt at his throat; he could feel it beating against his chest. Panic seized him. His nerves came alive and his mind raced like a computer, tumbling through possibilities and discarding them as soon as they were conceived. He forced himself to be calm—to breathe deeply and think. Deciding he would never find Alan this way, he decided to return to the car, find the police, and wait. Defeated, but at least sure of his course, he stood and began to walk down the sidewalk.

Alan stood on the roof of the building and gazed out onto the city below. A foggy mist had moved in and it shrouded the buildings like a blanket, diffusing the many lights into stars. He drew a breath of the cold night air that had before seemed harsh but now gave him new life. Alan thought it was really quite beautiful, and, if he were given a choice, he'd stand here and just soak it all in.

Peering out over the skyline, he found the familiar store and intersection a few blocks away. Alan's blood tingled with hope. He felt he could make it back now, and there he would find safety. David would surely be there, and they would soon be going home. He sprinted across the roof to a small structure that sheltered a staircase leading to the hall below. Opening the door he eased down the dark stairway and into the hall.

The officer holstered his gun while climbing the stairs, and when he turned the corner of the hall on the top story, he was unprepared to run into the kid who had just emerged from a small doorway. Both were in shock, and neither moved for a few moments. Alan turned down the hall and fled. The officer drew his gun and gave chase.

"Hold it!" he yelled, determined not to let him escape again. Alan ran on, oblivious it seemed, of the officer's threats. Angry and irritated, the officer threatened again at the top of his lungs. "Stop now or I'll shoot!" The kid didn't even turn around! Does he think I'm foolin'? he thought.

The officer took aim and fired.

David heard the shot and turned his head skyward. The sound had seemed to come from the top of the building he was standing beside, but he couldn't be sure. He had no way of knowing who fired the shot, or why, but he felt certain it concerned Alan. Without hesitation he ran into the apartment building and ascended the steps.

Alan felt a sharp pain in his arm as he turned to descend the staircase. Glancing back, he saw the man lower his gun and run as if to claïm his kill. Alan was determined not to be caught; he was too close to freedom to lose now. His wound bled badly and soaked his coat until it became wet and heavy with blood. He grabbed his arm and pressed hard in an attempt to check the flow of blood, but it seemed to bring no results. He reached the hall and ran down it, cradling his injured arm like a baby.

The officer stepped quickly down the stairs and emerged in the hall in time to see Alan turn the corner ahead of him. He yelled for him to stop, but again it had no effect on the kid. The officer ran after him, sliding as he turned the corner, and braced himself against the wall as he took aim. A door was directly beyond the kid, so he dropped his barrel and continued his pursuit.

Alan's arm was burning and throbbing as he ran, and he felt he must stop or he would black out. Spurred by the will to escape, he sprinted ahead down the hall to the stairs leading down.

The officer turned the corner with his gun in hand. The kid was descending the stairs; he could see his head disappear below the level of the floor. A trail of crimson droplets were beaded and splattered on the smooth tile. The officer ran to the top of the stairs. "Stop or I'll shoot!" he said. His voice echoed through the hall in strange resonance. He had grown tired of repeating it. The officer leveled his gun and fired a shot into the back of the kid's leg. Alan's head snapped back and his hand flew down to the wound. He stumbled and fell down the stairs, his arms flying in front of him in a vain attempt to break his fall. His head hit the floor with a solid, sickening crack. The officer descended the stairs, holstering his pistol.

David's first thought when he heard the shot was that it sounded much too close. His mind had envisioned the scene before he turned the corner and witnessed it, but it was still a shock. David felt tears of anger and frustration well up behind his eyes. He knelt beside Alan's body, feeling he should make some attempt to revive him, but knowing it was impossible. Alan's arm was crumpled beneath his body; his head lay on its side in an attitude of sleep, but there was no breathing—no

motion. Just stillness and silence. His body was illuminated by a window above, painting his face pale in the glow. The weird, orange glow.

The officer stood to the side, not really wanting to interfere, but realizing he must go through the procedures. "I'm really sorry," he said, but his apology sounded false, even to himself—David didn't acknowledge it at all. The officer knelt down to David's level. "Where did you come from—just now?" he asked.

"I followed you," David answered, keeping his head lowered. The officer nodded. "I know this is difficult," he said. "I've—seen it so many times." David stared at the far wall. Already sirens wailed on the street below. "I didn't want it to end like this. I tried to get him to stop," he continued, "but he wouldn't listen . . . I couldn't catch him." The man shook his head sadly, then rose, not wanting to talk over the lifeless body anymore. He awaited his fellow officers rushing into the building; the flashing police lights throbbed from the street below.

"Alan never did anything wrong in his life," David said at some length. His voice seemed to shock the officer, who turned to look at him. After a while the officer thought he had imagined the voice, and turned to the window again. "How could you just shoot him?" David asked angrily.

"I told him to stop," he said; then continued gently, "I didn't want him to die." David flinched at his words. "If he were innocent, why didn't he stop? I told him who I was, and why wouldn't he have stopped when I threatened to shoot?" he asked. The man stood by the wall, his eyes met David's.

David's eyes fixed on a point far away; perhaps it existed only in his mind, far beyond the small hallway. Footsteps approached from the stairs down the hall. "He didn't stop—because he didn't hear you," he said expressionlessly, his face turning once more to the officer's. "He's deaf."

Chris Nesmith

Blinding Sight

It couldn't have happened to a nicer person. In fact, I'm glad it happened to her. I know that I should feel sorry for her, but I can't. I know I shouldn't be happy because of someone else's misfortune, but I am. For one thing, it made me love her, and it made her understand me.

I guess it all began when she decided to remove me, lock, stock, and barrell, from the McWillie Institute for the Blind. She came storming into my classroom one day and announced that she was taking her child home with her that instant. I turned my head toward her voice and tried to give her a demanding look. I guess it worked well enough, because in a rustle of fabric and a click of heels she was beside me. The fabric of her dress, new by the smell, taffeta by the sound rustled again as she leaned close to me and whispered, "Come on, baby, Mother is taking you home for good." And with that, she pulled me up from my chair and demanded that I take her to the owner of the place. "Always to straight to the top," she had told me once.

"Mama," I said, "the owner isn't here, we'll have to go to the headmistress, Mrs. Brown, if you want to withdraw me from the institute."

"The headmistress?" I sensed her frown at this.

"Uh, the manager, Mama."

"Oh. All right, baby, come along, show Mama where it is."

Off we went, the rustle of Mama's expensive taffeta drowning out the whisper of my plain cotton, as we walked briskly to Mrs. Brown's office.

The headmistress and Mama were in the office with the door closed for a long time. From what I gathered, Mama had heard some rumors tarnishing the reputation of the Institute. Something about some children leaving the school grounds unattended and without anyone knowing about it. Mrs. Brown tried very hard to explain to Mama that it would be quite impossible for any of the students to leave the school grounds without assistance. Mrs. Brown always tried very hard. She was the first sighted person we'd ever had as headmistress, and being sighted among five hundred blind girls and twelve blind teachers, she always felt that she had to try very hard. All the girls liked Mrs. Brown, even though she could see, but that didn't make her feel any less uneasy, and she always avoided all forms of the words "look" and "see." Anyway, Mama was not to be convinced that the rumor, which I had already guessed was some wild concoction of her own to keep from giving the real reason for snatching me out of the Institute after eleven successful years, was not true.

Late that afternoon, I found myself riding beside my mother in her most recent acquisition, a long limosine, equipped, of course, with its very own chauffer, Charles. All of my things were loaded into the trunk, I suppose, "Charles took care of them," and "Lolita will take care of them when we reach the house." And we were on our way.

The hour's ride home was not a pleasant experience. Mother's expensive perfume nearly choked me, and she nearly made me deaf by screaming at Charles to slow down the whole time. I tried to ignore Mother, her screaming, and her perfume, but to no avail. So, I decided to question her about her sudden decision to uproot me and thus throw my entire life out of focus.

"Throw your life out of focus?" she asked. I could sense that she was hiding something from me, so I asked her about it.

"Don't be ridiculous," she sniffed. "What would I have to hide from you, baby?"

I knew that I would never be able to dig it out of her. She would tell me only when she was ready to tell me, so I relaxed into the soft leather of the seat and switched my thoughts to the only friend I'd had for the past eleven years. Mary was my best friend, she and I shared everything. She hated her father, I my mother, so we had quite a bit to talk about. We had both learned to tolerate them, I suppose because we knew we had each other to tell our problems to. I had learned over the years to ignore the fact that my mother, upon learning that I would never be able to see again as a result of a car accident, had carted me off to McWillie's and left me there alone and lost in a suddenly dark world.

But now, I won't have Mary to talk to: I am going back to my house. No, not my home. McWillie's was a home. People cared for me there and for everyone else, and I cared about them, too, but it wasn't that way at my house. At my house, there were servants and my mother, and whoever her current boyfriend was. A house, that was all it had ever been to me.

My father had died just before I was born, leaving my mother alone with me, the servants and a huge estate. Perhaps Mother felt that Fate had dealt her a cruel hand, taking her husband when she was young, and the sight of her only child six years later. Fate had turned her into an unfeeling, uncaring woman. She spent most of her time traveling from continent to continent, eventually not even bothering to come home on holidays to visit me. Oh, I've always had the best of everything; everything, that is, except a mother. That's what I was thinking when Mother touched my hand and informed me that we were "home." I got out of the car and walked the uneven path to the front door, being careful

not to trip on the stones as I had on my last visit. Once inside my mother took me into the den and closed the heavy oak door. She led me to a chair and I sat down, knowing that I was about to learn the reason for my sudden departure from school.

"Now then, baby," she said, "I have something to tell you."

I held my breath.

"Mother is getting married."

This, I had not expected. I was shocked, but there was more to come. We were selling the house, moving out of state, and I, she proudly announced, was going to attend public school.

"Why?" I asked. "Why are you disrupting my entire life?"

"I'm lonely," my mother replied. "I need a companion."

"Lonely? You put your only child in an institute at the age of six because she's blind, and you tell me that you are lonely. You could have tried to accept my blindness, you know. I could have been your companion."

"The institute has been my entire life for eleven years, Mama, I was happy there. And now . . ." I didn't continue. I knew Mother was not going to listen, or care. So I just sat there, thinking about the past eleven years. I remembered how she had sent me away when I needed her most, I remembered how she had never been at home when I wanted a mother to talk to, I remembered how she had always been more concerned about her social standing than my well-being. Most of all I remembered how she had been repulsed and revolted by my blindness. She felt that blindness was a weakness and had totally disregarded the fact that she had given birth to me. No, this woman could never admit to having an abnormal child. She was ashamed. Or was she full of guilt? The accident had been her fault. She had been drinking, running that stop sign had cost her her baby's sight. If she hadn't been with that man, drinking, and hadn't tried to drive us both home, the accident never would have happened, and I would not be blind.

Fate had not dealt my mother the cruel hand: it had dealt it to me. I reached for the bell that sat on the table to my right and rang it until Lolita came to take me to my room. I wasn't even aware if my mother was still in the room, and I didn't care.

Once in my room, I lay down and tried to decide what I could possibly do to change my mother's mind. Then the subject of my thoughts floated into my room in a whisper of silk, probably a nightgown. She came to my bed and sat down.

"Baby," she began.

"Don't call me baby!" I cried. "I'm not a baby. I'm blind."

She stood up and I could feel her staring at me. She stood by my bed for a while, but said nothing, and finally she left.

For the next few days, I sulked. I willed God to kill me, or Mother, or both of us. I built up a hatred for the man soon to become my father, the man who had destroyed the only happiness I'd ever known. When he moved into the west wing of the house until the wedding, I had even more reason to hate him. I hated his whining nasal voice and his shrill laugh. I even hated his name: Harold Tubbs. I sensed that he considered me a burden. He, like Mrs. Brown, avoided using any forms of the words "look" and "see" in my presence, but from him, it was an insult. I hated more and more with each passing day.

Finally, the fateful wedding night arrived and I was determined not to go to the wedding. I locked myself in my room while the happy couple were dressing for the big event. When they discovered that I was locked in my room and refused to come out, Mother did not even try to persuade me to come along. She told me that she would speak to me when she returned; they didn't want to be late for their own wedding. I unlocked the door as I heard the car drive away and tried to relax.

I was sitting at my desk reading a school book some time later when Lolita burst into the room crying. She finally calmed down enough to take me downstairs to the foyer. There, a man's detached voice regretted to inform me that my mother had been badly injured in an automobile accident and Harold Tubbs killed. Probably on the way home from the wedding, I guessed. I thanked the man and sent Lolita to get my coat. Charles and Lolita and I, all in the front seat of the new limo, rushed to the hospital, where we were told that Mother had been heavily sedated and that we would have to come back the next day.

I went to bed as soon as we got back to the house, and as I lay there, I tried to feel something for the woman who called herself my mother. I could not. I dropped easily off to sleep, thinking that I would soon be returning to McWillie's.

The next morning, Charles and Lolita and I returned to the hospital. Lolita and I were allowed to visit Mother, "But only for a few minutes," the nurse told us. "She's received a very bad head injury, so try not to upset her. The doctor will want to speak with you after you see her."

We walked into the room. My mother's ragged breath was the only sound in the room, the only smell was of antiseptic. I heard the sheets moving as Lolita led me to my mother's bed. When I reached the bed, my mother's hand fumbled for mine. When she found my hand she grasped it firmly and said, "Sharon, is that you?" Lolita began to cry.

"Mother," I asked softly, "can't you see me?"

"No," she cried softly, "I can't see you. I cannot see."

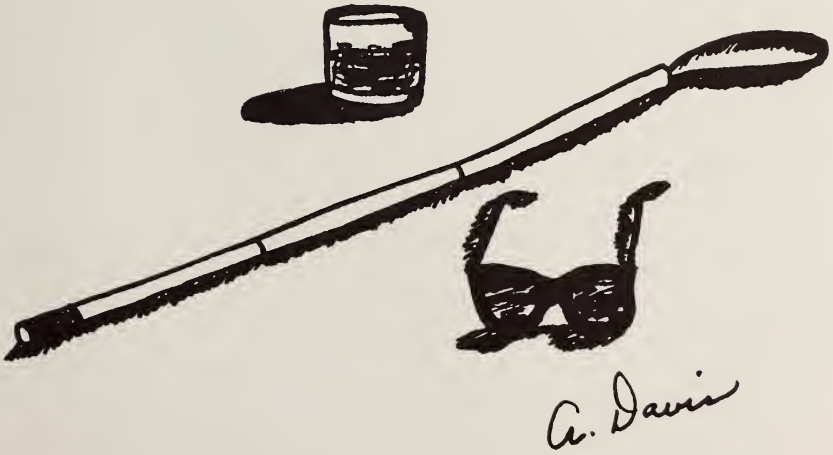
"Oh, Mama . . ." I began. Tears ran silently down my cheeks as I stood there holding my mother's hand.

"Sharon," she said, "I never knew what it was like for you, I never understood. I'm so sorry."

She began crying again and I leaned down and held her. I held her for a long time before she spoke again. Finally, she broke the agonizing silence. She said two words to me then, the two words that changed my life, and hers, forever. Two words that made me realize that I loved her. "I understand." And she pulled away from me to bury her head in the pillow.

I motioned for Lolita and as we walked out the door, I said softly, "I'm leaving now, Mama. I'm going home."

Andrea Davis



Just Whisper My Name

It's the fall semester of my sophomore year in college. My brother is deathly ill. He's in the Murfreesboro General Hospital. I guess the diagnosis that his doctor made when my brother was a small, sickly child has proven itself correct. He is only twenty-seven years old; that is too young for anyone to die, much less my brother. He proved those doctors wrong once by growing into the strong man that they said he would never be, so why can't he just prove them wrong now? He's got a new wife, a new baby, and a new home. So much to live for and yet he won't even get to see his son's first birthday.

It's December 11, just two weeks before Christmas. The wind is so frigid and I'm shivering in the briskness of the evening. The tears that are rolling down my face seem to be freezing, just like my heart. He **would** have to die on the most icy day of December. Just what I need. Nothing like a white funeral.

My brother, Brandon, is my best friend. He is the one who taught me to respect life and people. He is the one who showed me that there is always an answer to my problems and that I am not a confused and ignorant little girl but a bright and stable young woman. Who is going to pull me out of the holes that I will inevitably dig myself into now that Brandon is dead? I am all alone, swimming in a sea of people who neither understand me or care to try.

My future doesn't look too promising in the way of relationships. Brandon has always been my "character advisor." He has never chosen my friends for me; he just keeps telling me to "keep playing the field and one day you'll make the right play." Six out of the only six relationships I've ever been involved in have failed. It's gotten to the point where I no longer have faith in relationships; period.

I'll just keep to myself as much as possible. I am my own worst enemy. I'll just talk about my problems with myself and pretend that Brandon is right here with me, coaching me along. It won't be hard adjusting to being on my own. It's not like Brandon is . . . was my only friend. He is just the only one I can . . . could trust. I'm not going to completely withdraw from society, I'll just start spending more time to myself. I've been hurt too many times, whether intentionally or not, to let myself get that close to anyone ever again. No one will ever understand me as well as Brandon did. He wasn't just another brother. He was someone who could give me something to hold onto in life, something to hope for. He was someone I could pattern a part of my life after.

I keep recalling what it was like growing up in the care of my Uncle Charles and Aunt Celia. I still remember the day my parents left us with them. I was seven years old and my own mother left me with another woman, her sister, a very poor substitute for the joy of living and growing up with my own family. Brandon didn't seem to mind living with them too much, though. If he hadn't been there, I would probably have run away. It's been so long ago, I don't even feel the anxiety that comes with the feeling of rejection. I have disciplined myself to be immune to pain. Persuading myself that I will never be able to trust anyone again has been, and will continue to be, the easiest thing I will ever do; everyone is just alike. Some people tell me I shouldn't make a generalization like that. How can I help it? Everyone lies to me, or leaves me, or dies on me. If I don't get involved too deeply with anyone, I won't have to suffer. I am tired of being used. I can't and I won't take it any more.

I got a job in a grocery store today. I'm working to save money for Christmas presents and to pay my second semester's tuition. The manager told me that I could work here for as long as I wanted to. It makes things a lot easier knowing that I don't have to depend on my relatives for anything more than a place to stay on the weekends and during holidays. I lucked up in the boss department, and he seems pretty impressed that I'm going back to school. I like this job; it's easy enough. I'll just stay on through the rest of the semester and save up some money. Who knows, maybe I'll be a new person come January.

It's really busy today, I guess the reason is because it's a Saturday. So many people have come through my lane that the faces are beginning to all look alike. Oh, now that guy really looks familiar. I know his face, but where have I seen him before? I can't put a name to that face but it doesn't matter anyway, he's just another customer. I'm checking him out. I've totaled his bill and he's paid, but he's still lingering on. What's the deal here? He wants to talk for a while, I guess it's okay. He says he's going to see me again real soon. Right. And donkeys fly. I could not be so fortunate as to have someone this cute interested in me. It doesn't matter anyway. I'm not going to get involved. I'm too busy to worry about a perfect stranger coming around.

The holidays have passed so quickly. I'm back at school now. I'm holding up well under the circumstances. It's Thursday of the first week of second semester and I'm walking to class. It must be in the water or something because everywhere I look there are people standing close and talking together. Best friends and couples whispering and laughing. They all seem to be talking about poor little old me. They're all staring. I'm just paranoid. They couldn't possibly be staring at me. What's that little rhyme — "paranoia will destroy you?" "Cheer up," they say. "You

look like you just lost your best friend." Little do they know. They all treat me like I'm sick. They think I'm going to break down any time. I'm not made of glass. I will survive. The last thing I want or need is a lot of people fussing over me all of the time. In fact, I'd get over it a lot quicker if they would leave me alone.

This room is so full of desks. I'm so glad I'm the only one in here right now. Sociology is going to be a fun class. Well, I'm not alone anymore. That door squeaks so loudly. I wonder who's joining me? Whoever it is just sat in my line of vision. The teacher looks nice. I'll bet she's easy to talk to and understand. I hope she uses the other chalkboard so I can see. She must be reading my mind. Why me? I am so clumsy. I've dropped all my books on the floor. It must be my lucky day, only one person turned around to look. Wait a minute. That's not just any person, that's the guy from the grocery store.

"Thanks for . . . uh . . . picking these up . . . I'm . . . uh . . . thanks!"

What is he doing here? He said he'd see me later, but he didn't say he'd see me in class. I have a sneaking suspicion that I haven't seen the last of him either. I'm tired of taking notes. I wonder if he is taking anymore classes with me? Hey, where did he go?

This cafeteria smells like who'd have thought it!

"What is this stuff?"

"The same stuff we had for dinner last night."

"And lunch yesterday!"

"I can't eat this, guys, yuk! I'm going out for pizza." If that guy doesn't quit staring at me I'm going to scream! The more I eat of this beef stuff the worse it tastes.

"Would you **PLEASE** quit staring at me?"

"Please switch seats with me, Todd?"

Another day another picture. Here lately all I do is pose for yearbook group shots. I can't believe the nerve of that new guy. He thinks I wear all these dresses for his benefit. "I like it when you wear dresses," he says. "It seems like you are wearing them for me."

Give me a break! I wonder what his name is? I'd like to tell **him** a thing or two. He must have it really bad to think that I would wear clothes like this just for his sake. No use getting all upset and bothered about it now. I've got to get out of this dress.

Studying is no fun these days. Last year we all studied together in the library. Tonight, I'm the only one in here. Maybe that's better, in a way. I might be able to pass this biology test if I study alone. Why are these booths so close together? I can't even breathe much less study. I wish Brandon were here to help me study like he used to do

on the weekends. I've got to quit thinking about him or I won't ever pass this test. I just don't feel like he is dead, and yet I know he is. I can feel his presence all around me, and yet I know he is not here. Why do I get the feeling that this new guy is following me around everywhere I go? So much for being alone in the library. He's coming toward me. What am I supposed to do? Brandon, if you're watching, give me a signal of what to do.

"Are you studying alone? May I sit and study with you?"

"I guess you can since you're already sitting. I'd hate to be rude."

Just great! I didn't ask for a study partner, Brandon.

"Look, you've been following me around for days, staring and even talking about me to other people. What is the deal here? Are you a pervert or something? I don't even know your . . ."

"Heath."

"Heath. Well I guess I know it now. That's a nice name. Do you always interrupt like that?"

"Sometimes."

"I remember you from the store. I was shocked to see you again. I never dreamed you'd be picking up my books in sociology class. By the way, thanks."

"Don't mention it. Let's study."

Not much of a conversationalist, huh Brandon.

This is unreal. I made an 85 on my test. I wonder what Heath made?

Heath and I are getting to be pretty close friends. He is a nice guy. I've never met anyone that sensitive, except for Brandon, of course. We seem to be spending an awful lot of time together. He likes it that way. He doesn't like to be around a lot of people. I'm going against my better judgement and growing close to someone just like I said I would never do again. It seems different with him somehow, though. Where have I seen that natural quality before? He is so familiar to me but I can't place him. I'm tired of trying to figure him out. I'll just let it go for now and see what happens.

He won't tell me where he is from or what his last name is. He may not know. What if he has amnesia? I hope he isn't suffering from schizophrenia. That would be bad for him and me. He isn't like all the other guys I know. Even though he acts strange, I feel I can trust him and best of all I don't feel like I have to fall in love with him or worry about him falling in love with me. We're friends and that's plenty for me. I don't think he's going to be around much longer anyway. I've just got

this feeling. There isn't one guy, or girl for that matter, that could possibly be as good as Heath. Not anyone from around here anyway.

I don't understand what his problem is, but, Heath is acting more strange than ever. Today, he gave me a picture of himself. It's a very good photo. He's on a horse in a beautiful pasture. It seems like he's trying to tell me not to forget about him. I could never do that. He keeps telling me over and over again that, if I need him to just whisper his name and he won't be far. That's what he tells me instead of saying goodbye. He says that "goodbye" is too final. He'd rather say "Later," or "Next time."

It is the day before final exams start. I'm sitting here on my bed and thinking about Heath. I wonder why he really came here? What is his purpose? Who am I trying to kid? I know why he's here. He's here to be my friend. He came to save me from my depression over Brandon's death. He has certainly helped me to get over **that** quickly. Heath has helped me to look inside my soul and see that my heart is no longer an iceberg. I can now think of Brandon as a calming presence that surrounds me when I get nervous or lonely.

It's time for the biology final, but where is Heath? I know where he is. He's gone. I can feel it. He didn't come here to stay and I knew that from the beginning. He came to give me a second faith in myself and the human race. I'm glad he didn't tell me goodbye. But then **he** never would say that. I still wish he would have told me he was leaving. But just in case, I'll ask the teacher if he took his test early. He may be trying to finish up early so he can leave quicker.

I can't believe it. Heath is not even on the class roll. That is not possible. What happened to all those hours we spent together? He sat in the back of the room every day, didn't he? He even left me a picture. It's right here in my biology notebook. Here it is. But there is no horse. There is no Heath. There is only grass and trees and sky. And what is this writing on the back of the picture?

"JUST WHISPER MY NAME."

Beverly Clark

A Season Without Rain

The red clay hills had lost their softness, their coolness. They were rocks against a bright, empty sky, with loblolly pines jutting upward into it. The grass was brown and brickly, and crunched underneath Erin's feet as she walked. The earth beneath it was hard and unyielding to her feet. Ignoring the crevices bent into the earth, the girl strode down the old dummyline railroad, which was choked with thirsty greenery and underbrush. She continued across the meadow of golden parched hay. Her cotton dress billowed, but only from the natural stride of her walk; there wasn't even a slight breeze mingled in the air.

The sun was a huge, blinding ball of yellow light, bearing down on the field, on Erin. A straw hat protected her auburn hair, and a grosgrain ribbon secured it beneath her slightly upturned chin. She was tall and straightbacked; pretty with her country pure skin and eyes of deep indigo, the same color as her cotton print dress.

Erin came down the hill and off the red clay embankment, her arm looped through the handle of the basket carrying the extra hen eggs. She stepped down onto the gravel road across from the store. Dust went into her nostrils. Soon the dizzying scent of gasoline drifted her way as she neared the red and white striped gas pump.

She stepped over a puddle of Nehi Orange, quickly evaporating off the concrete front of the store. The front step looked cool and comforting; shaded by the shed, the dark concrete seemed to store the cool. She remembered how as a little girl she had enjoyed putting her bare feet on that step and soaking up the cool from within it. As she pulled open the dark green screen door, she believed it creaked louder than it ever had before. She walked into the darker interior of the store, slightly cooler because of the old fan that whirred in the corner, and noticed that the community ladies were there, as they always were on Tuesday afternoons. It seemed that they, too, like the door, squalked louder than ever. Heavy southern accents mixed with the heavy air as Erin went inside.

"So I said to Cora at the dinner on the ground, 'Why, you know like everybody else that my carrot cake has always been better than Miss Martha's anyway, so I just can't imagine why she'd even bother to brag about it . . .' " Miss Marilou, the large pink lady, said as she wiped sweat daintily from underneath a blonde curl on her forehead.

"Well, honey, let me tell you — she's always made her chicken n' dumplins' wrong. She barely even cleans the chicken — then has the nerve to bring it to the church socials and near 'bout contaminate all

the good church folk!" Miss Carol said, fanning briskly with a paper fan with a picture of the Lord's Supper on it. "Well, I'm really not surprised," drawled Miss Dorothy Lee, the dark-haired lady, the most elegant of the three. "Oh . . . Hello, Erin, dear!"

"Yes, darlin', how are you?" Miss Marilou inquired.

"Just fine, thank you, Miss Marilou."

"And your momma and daddy, how are they?" Miss Carol echoed.

"Everyone's fine, Miss Carol. I hope that your family's well."

"Oh yes, yes. Patricia's just as happy as a new bride can be, she married that plantation owner over in Raliegh you know. We were so proud that she made such a good match for herself, and the child just loves it up there, the house and all that beautiful land . . . And my other daughter Marcia in Belzoni just had her second baby — another boy. Named this one Jacob Elliot after his daddy."

"Oh, how nice," Erin said as she moved to the shelf and began to pick up a box of Argo starch and a bag of salt.

"Oh, ladies, I forgot to tell you that Amy Sue's weddn' pictures are back, and they are positively lovely!" Miss Dorothy Lee began.

"Amy Sue did have a lovely weddn'. All those pink ribbons and lace, cake for a hundred people; it really was somethin' to see. You really did outdo yourself, Dorothy Lee," Miss Marilou said.

"Why thank you, Marilou. I personally think it was one of the prettiest weddn's Lawrence County has ever seen. But then Amy Sue's such a pretty girl herself, she just had to have the perfect weddn'. She is just positively glowin' in those pictures; you all must see them!"

"Well, my niece Emma Billings over at Fair River is gettn' married. She's marrin' that Walker boy the twentieth of this month," Miss Marilou announced. "He's a fine young man, and her momma, my sister, is planning a nice weddn' for the two of 'em. Erin dear, weren't you and my niece in the same class? I can't seem to remember," said Miss Marilou.

"No, Miss Marilou. I'm a great deal older than Emma."

"Yes, I know the Walker boy, and he's only eighteen himself, and why you're twenty-eight aren't you, Erin, dear?" inquired Miss Dorothy Lee.

"Twenty-seven," Erin corrected.

"Oh, I see," said Miss Marilou, while Miss Carol fanned a little faster.

"Is that all you need for today, dear?" asked Miss Carol, rising to the counter.

"Yes, ma'am. I think this is enough." Erin replied, paying for the merchandise with the eggs and placing her items in the basket as mousy

Carol Josten pulled her glasses down on her nose and rang the white numbers by hand onto the old black register.

Erin walked out the creaky screen door and back out into the heat. It didn't seem as hot as it was on her way in. Generally it began to cool around four o'clock every afternoon. It was a lazy, lonely day; the type of weather that brought on a lot of thinking because it was the only type of work people could do without getting too hot, and most of the time they did anyway.

The house was a comforting place, painted white, with a red tin roof and a big oak shadowing it and the dusty yard. Erin breezed through the screen door into the kitchen. Ellen Greer had grown accustomed to its rhythmic slamming as it glided into the door facing one hundred times a day. Her husband was far too careless to mind a door, her younger children far too quick, and her oldest daughter Erin often too preoccupied.

Erin set the groceries down on the worn white countertop, patterned with faded grey stars, twinkling and smelling clean after a bout with Dutch Boy cleanser. She smelled the blend of meal, milk, and flour. It was cornbread batter that her mother was mixing in the big yellow bowl.

"Did you see anyone at the store today, dear?" asked Ellen.

"Yes, ma'am. Miss Carol, Miss Dorothy Lee, and Miss Marilou.

"And how were they?"

"Boasting as usual."

"Now, Erin, you know . . . oh well, I guess it is true. What was it today?"

"Their relatives' weddings, of course."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Josten told me all about her daughter marryin' that plantation owner. It was really a surprise, being that Patricia's such a plain girl and all."

"Momma," Erin said, "Patricia Josten married a dirt farmer, she lives in a tiny old house, and I bet her husband couldn't grow a potato if he had to. I saw her when I went through there the other day. And poor Miss Carol has everyone believing she's living the life of a Southern Belle. But I guess she couldn't marry much better . . . Oh . . . but I guess I shouldn't talk."

Her mother stirred the cornbread batter a little faster, a little harder, poured it into the iron skillet, and hastily pushed it into the stove.

The stove and the summertime just did not mix. The sultry heat of the stove began to fill the kitchen for the sake of the cornbread.

Erin retreated through the back room, where the jars of fruit can-

ned last year cluttered together on the shelf, and what vegetables that could be gathered huddled freshly canned on an old blue bedspread in the coolest corner; she slipped out the door and onto the back porch. It was shaded by the old oak, and a little by the scampy fig tree that cowered from the heat. The chickens cackled and strolled lazily through the dusty yard. Erin looked out past the car shed and the well and saw her grandfather coming in from the field. He clumped his way through the garden with his boots; the soil was chunky and hard now, almost to the point where it wasn't soil anymore. His denim overalls were wet with sweat, and his face, which had reddened from the sun in spite of his big straw hat, now clashed with his white hair and mustache. He came to the porch and Erin hightailed to the kitchen for a big glass of ice water. He propped his leg on the porch's edge and with his red bandanna, dabbed the moisture off his forehead as he let out a deep "Whew." Erin handed him the cold glass with both hands and he drank it down before speaking. "Ahh," he said. "More?" Erin asked. "No. That was mighty fine, honey. Thankya."

"It's hot out there, gal," he said as he set down the glass and reached for the bandanna again.

"Yes, sir, it is. I walked to the store with the eggs this afternoon."

"Oh, you did? How does Al Ferguson's hay look down on that lower side?"

"Pretty bad, Pap-Paw," Erin said.

"Well, I reckon everbody's is that way. Let's go pick them butterbeans, gal. It ain't gonna get no cooler."

Erin retrieved her hat while her grandfather got four tin buckets out of the smoke house.

Together the two walked down to the garden, grandfather carrying the buckets and Erin tying on her hat. They marched through the lifeless-looking pea rows, and the weak and sickly tomatoes that bent over as if to say they were old and giving up, to finally reach the four straight butterbean rows.

Erin squatted down in the dry dirt and almost regretfully began to pick the puny beans from their mothering vines. So small, spotted, and sickly in their leathery hulls, they seemed too immature to be taken; but they would surely die if left out in the heat for another day.

Erin remembered picking beans on cool summer mornings with drops of dew still on them; how wet and sticky and cool they felt in her hands. How fresh and new everything was; as the soil was moist and black, and yielded big, wholesome beans in hulls of bright green. On those mornings a breeze would whittle gently through the rows before the sun rose hot and high in the sky, but never as hot as it was now.

It was the summer of 1948, and one of the hottest and driest Mississippi had ever seen. The last rain had fallen over two months ago on a May afternoon. Ever since the vegetables, hay, and fruit had been dying slow deaths to the 100° temperatures and parching sun that came day after day without fail. There was no breeze, no moisture; only tension, only worry.

"Don't look so sad, gal," Grandfather shattered the silence. "It's jest a season without rain, that's all. It'll come in time. The good Lord saw fit to bring our boys home from over yonder; why, we thought that would never come, but it did. And he'll see fit to send the rain too, in time. Yep, it's jest a season without rain, that's all. It's not for always."

And they kept on picking the butterbeans.

A little later the beans lay cooling under the shade of the front porch, on a stained old bedsheet, as Erin, Ellen, her husband Joshua, Grandfather, and young Ray, Robert, and Jilly sat down to peas, okra, cold milk and the warm cornbread.

After Ellen, Erin, and Jilly finished washing, rinsing, and drying the dishes, Grandfather carried with him a plate of food wrapped in foil and headed home to Grandma, waiting at the little white house around the corner.

After Grandfather had gone, the family huddled around the radio in the living room. Their laughter pealed through the house as they listened.

Erin excused herself to the sanctuary of her room. She opened the door and flipped on the naked light bulb and saw that her room was clean, fresh, and even cooler than the rest of the house because it had been shut off from the heat of the stove by the thick pine door. Her crisp white curtains were tied back and the windows opened. She stretched out across her feather bed, sighed, and began to trace out the patterns in the worn white chenille bedspread; her mind traced out thoughts in the same manner, slowly, softly, carefully.

Restless, Erin got up from the bed, got down on her hands and knees on the wood plank floor and looked under her bed. Underneath it was a box of empty canvases, her paints and brushes, and a few of her newest paintings, wrapped in brown paper. On the other side of the floor was a King Edward cigar box draped in a filmy cobweb. The man on the lid garded Erin's treasures. The box held dried roses, ribbons, report cards, pictures, and high school letters from Tom.

She remembered plainly the day she had left New Zion to attend the Mississippi State College for Women on an art scholarship. She had enjoyed school, but sometimes she could almost smell her momma's lemon pound cake baking all the way up in Columbus; and she was

almost glad when the war escalated in 1942 and she had to go home again. She came home to find that Tom had found a new girl three months after she had left, a sweet young thing named Angie Sullivan that sat in church every Sunday with her hands folded, never saying anything, just smiling a shy smile from under her batting lashes. Two months later he had gone off to fight with the rest and had flown back to Angie the minute it was over. So Erin ignored the box, let the letters lie there with the crumpled roses, and pulled out the paintings.

She gently pulled back the brown paper from each one, and making a gallery of her bed, put each one on display. The oil paints trickled together just right, in form and in feeling; making a pine-belt sunset, a clever crane on Biloxi Beach, and a flat Delta cottonfield; little worlds on canvas, all Erin's own. She looked down at them.

She walked to the antique dresser and reached down to a tiny cedar chest on top of it. As she opened it, the fresh cedar smell made a forest of the room. She pulled out a card, and felt over its raised letters as though she was reading braille.

Three years ago, Erin had been to an art show and conference in Brookhaven, twenty miles away, at the public library. "Keenan Manfield" the card read. That was the kindly gentleman who had praised her work, told her that her paintings showed great promise and left her the card. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I realize that America is dedicated fully to her cause right now," he told the group, "but I expect that after the war is over America will be a cultural showplace greater than ever, with a sharp eye out for the new, the vital, and the timeless." "Keenan Manfield, 702 Rothenberry Lane, Albany, New York 026-2196," Erin read once again.

She walked back to the bed and looked down at the paintings and as she did her fingers unconsciously roamed over the raised letter again. She caught a glimpse of her reflection in the dresser mirror, against the railing of the spindle bed. She looked for a long time. Then she put the card back inside the cedar box and rewrapped the paintings and put them back under the bed. She slipped into a faded pink cotton nightgown, turned out the light, lay down on top of the covers, and fell into a drifting sleep.

The next morning the men got up at five o'clock and headed off to the cornfield to "beat the sun," as Joshua Greer said. Ellen watched the sun grow higher in the sky as she rubbed on the windows with her soapy rag until they squeaked clean. Out on the front porch Erin shook the rugs from the house. They popped loudly from Erin's arms and dust flew from them out onto a thick runway of air. She turned her head from the stifling dust. She spotted a small, fluffy promise of a cloud in the eastern sky.

"Dear, Carol Josten called," Ellen said as Erin walked back into the house with the piling of rugs, "You have a telegram at the store. . . . I can't imagine . . ."

"Well, I guess I'll walk over and get it. Do you need anything while I'm going?"

"No, dear, that's all right. You just run along and see what your telegram's about."

The walk was even warmer today because Erin had left her hat behind. When she walked through the screen door at the store she could see curiosity smeared all over the faces. Not very many telegrams came through New Zion. Miss Dorothy Lee and Miss Marilou were there, and it wasn't even their day.

"Oh hello, dear," they all chimed.

"You must have gotten my call, Erin," Carol Josten soloed.

"Yes, I did, Miss Carol. Mother said that you have a telegram for me."

"Yes, indeed," she said as she waltzed behind the counter. "All the way from Laurel this mornin'. Right here," she said as she patted it lovingly on the counter in front of Erin and smiled graciously.

"Thank you," Erin said as she took it and started out.

"Are — Aren't you going to read it, dear?" came Miss Dorothy Lee's voice from behind.

"Why, yes, of course. I'll read it later," Erin said as she turned once again and left.

She tore the paper as she reached the outside:

My dear Erin stop
I want you to come up and be my
date for the Chandler wedding stop will
be big event stop Let me know soon stop
Love Johnathan stop

Once again that evening the forks, spoons, and glasses clattered against white plates on the red gingham oilcloth as the Greers sat down to supper. After a hungry Robert said his fastest grace, they began to eat.

"Heard you got an invitation today, Erin," Joshua said as he passed the carrots.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what are you goin' to decide?"

"Yea, what are ya gonna decide?" echoed her brothers and sister.

Erin just said "I don't know," held her head down and took a bite of peas.

After the last dish was clean and put away, Erin sat down on the front porch in a straw-bottomed chair and looked out at the pink and blue splashes on the sky as the sun was going down. She didn't know what to do; what was right.

Maybe it's not so terribly bad to be an "old maid." Times are changing. Everyone should not be so backwards as to expect every woman to marry, especially if that woman is strong and capable. Why, we proved ourselves during the war, showed the men that we could do more than knit socks while they were at war. When Daddy left, Mom and I not only worked in the factory, but raised the vegetables as well as the boys. Those were hard days and nights of putting bolts in aircraft wheels, hoeing in the cornfields so the boys could stay in school, and still making sure no one did without a bite when suppertime came. Some say we've earned a place because of that, more than just wife, mother, sister. Even in the old times there were great women who stood alone; like Emily Dickinson . . . and why, Queen Elizabeth was one of the world's greatest monarchs and she was never married . . .

Yet Erin still felt a gnawing dread, a feeling of betrayal; somewhere in the back of her brain there were still pictures of prim little houses and gray hair, of living a life with Chippendale furniture and lap dogs, and empty solitude.

The moon had risen slowly and majestically over the pines. Erin looked up and saw that it had crept up into the blue night without her noticing it. "Oh, it's getting late," she whispered, "oh so late."

In all of her life she had never seen so many stars in the sky. They and the full moon lit up the night. Erin had always believed that the time of the full moon was a mysterious, symbolic time; Great Grandma Casey had told her so. Grandma Casey had planted by the moon and made her decisions by the moon, with the almanac by her side. The moon always seemed to portray something Erin could never quite understand. Maybe this time it really meant something. She looked around the ring of foggy light surrounding it, read its shadows and crevices and tried to decide what it was saying.

She remembered another full moon. It was in Columbus, 1941, her first formal dance at the college, the "W" the girls always called it. All the early autumn afternoon girls had bathed, powdered, and primped. Since the college was for women only, cadets from the nearby air force base were brought over for the formals.

It was a silver night. She remembered every detail. The dance was held outside around a large gazebo. Brass buttons glistened as shin-

ing white-coat cadets swirled on the dance floor in a sea of colorful organdy dresses. It was the night she had met Johnathan, his dark hair and eyes stark against the white uniform. All evening long they had danced among the boughs of magnolias, under the light of a halycon moon.

A few short months later, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and Lieutenant Johnathan Riley had left for his station at Virginia Beach. She'd seen him only once since, a little over a year ago when he had come home to Laurel. She remembered how surprised she was the day she came face to face with the Rileys, their wealth and respect, their beautiful family home, and their society that had accepted her as one of its own. They were openly disappointed when she told Johnathan she wasn't ready to marry, especially not into the money and society that went along with him.

The words she had read in the Bible three nights ago became clear; "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." And for her there was a season for change. She pulled herself away from the misty moonlight, went back into the house and picked up the phone receiver to call Johnathan and tell him she would be coming. "Good, Erin. I'm so glad," he said. "It seems I've been waiting years for your answer."

When Erin hung up the phone, her family was already in bed. She tiptoed across the plank floor to keep from waking her parents, as she had when she was four, sneaking to the kitchen for a nibble of leftover cornbread. Erin climbed into bed and fell asleep with the moonlight beaming in on the white cover.

Early Saturday morning Erin, in her crisp blue suit and hat, stood by a gumball machine in the bus station while her father purchased her ticket. Josh Greer walked his daughter out to the bus, kissed her on the cheek and waved goodbye as she stepped onto the bus bound for Laurel.

As the bus began to move, pictures of hills and pines flashed by with windows for frames. Erin's thoughts flashed as the scenery. Perhaps marriage was the answer after all. Selfish pictures entered her mind of saucy dresses, china for mirrors, and all the hats a woman could ever want . . . now, what could be bad about that?

"Money is the root of all evil!" shouted the preacher from the pine pulpit.

"Don't settle for anything but love, girl," Great Grandma Casey had said one day as Erin helped her cut the yellow roses in her front yard. "Yer Granddaddy and I was poor all our lives . . . but no two have ever been so happy . . . no two have ever loved as we did." In November

of that same year, when Erin was sixteen, she had thought her tears would never stop as they buried Grandma Casey and put yellow roses on her grave.

"To thine own self be true," Erin thought. "You were right, Great Grandma."

Most of the day and evening had passed as Erin walked through the rice grains on the churchyard, stepped into the black Continental Cabriolet and smiled at Johnathan as he closed the door for her and got in on the driver's side. The Chandler wedding had been beautiful, with the dusty roses, candlelight, and lavish reception.

Then they drove the fourteen miles homeward from Ellisville, where the wedding was. Passing under the streetlights, Erin's memories reflected off the pavement of days they had spent before Pearl Harbor; going to the picture shows in Columbus, to the ballgames in Starkville, or occasionally driving over to Tuscaloosa for a picnic.

The memory of the beautiful, blonde Chandler bride all in white laughed at her because she had to say no to the dusty roses and candlelight, society and money, and all the once-in-a-lifetime chances she had ever had.

They left the lights of town and reached a dark winding country road. They talked all the way, seeing each other laugh as they met with other carlights. He held her hand; and even the silence talked when they didn't.

At last the car rolled up the curved drive to the large house back in Laurel. Johnathan killed the car and helped Erin out. It was unusually dark. The two stumbled on the sidewalk and stopped to laugh. Johnathan bent down in a flourish and kissed her cheek: "I'm not going to ask you again tonight, Erin. I know what your answer would be. But I'm a patient man. The war has at least given me that; and I'll ask again in some other season; where there'll be a place for us, a time for us . . . I know there will be."

On the Sunday night she returned to New Zion, Erin sat on the hard church pew with her family. The old piano banged out shaped notes as the congregation sang loudly: "There shall be showers of blessing; this is the promise of love. There shall be seasons refreshing, sent from the father above . . ."

Soon the preacher was shouting blood and redemption from his pine pulpit. The words echoed off the stained glass and white plaster walls. "Money is the root of all evil!" he pounded once again. It was hot. Erin's yellow linen dress was sticking to the plank pew. She reached for her paper fan and whisked it gently in front of her face. The preacher's words were drifting.

How simple it was before I found out about the money. Johnathan and I had so much enjoyed being together before the war . . . without the money. And he hasn't changed . . . he hasn't changed a bit. Really I haven't either. I just don't feel as old as everyone thinks, especially when I'm with Johnathan . . .

"Let us pray," the preacher said, and Erin bowed her head just in time. Upon the "Amen" the people began their weekly handshaking and talking as they filtered out the double doors.

The next morning when Erin woke up, the sky was filled with clouds. The Greers worked through the morning; watching the clouds turn darker, each hour their burden of water growing heavier. At noon Joshua, Ray, Robert, and Jilly headed off to town, while Erin and her mother stayed behind to clean out the smoke house for the fall sweet potatoes.

They boxed Mason jars, threw out old tin buckets with holes in them, and swept up spilled chicken feed until the floor of the smoke house was clean, and the boxes stood like tin soldiers on the shelves.

As they stepped out again, the two noticed how unusually dark it was. Ominous clouds hovered overhead.

"Erin, run and get a dishpan and let's you and me pick the last of those cucumbers before they wash away."

Mother and daughter quickly pulled the prickly cucumbers from their vines as they squatted in the dusty garden.

"I hope I'm not scaring the rain away by pickin' these," Ellen said suspiciously.

They filled the big white dishpan. The clouds moved faster. "Run these to the house, while I get the clothes in," Ellen said.

Erin took the cucumbers to the porch and ran back to the clothesline to yank the family's towels, sheets, and undergarments from the wooden pins that held them to the wire.

Ellen carried the armload of clothes to the house, and Erin sat down in the yard swing and stared at the black clouds swooping down over the tin roof of the farm house. How oddly welcome they looked, floating heavily, growing blacker.

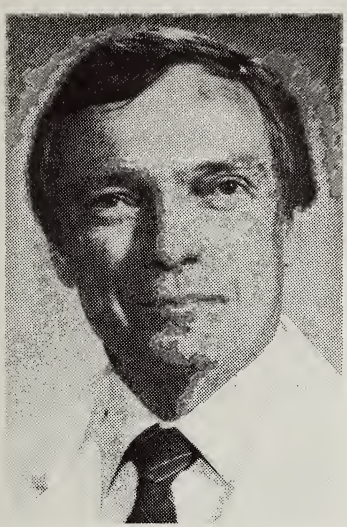
"Come in from out there, child; this weather might be dangerous," called Ellen's voice from the house.

But Erin sat still as brisk winds blew cooling, unsteady breezes into the pine trees above her. The clouds moved even faster as Erin stared at them. The sky was full of black, blue, grey, and white paints; mixing in a turmoil, growing darker and darker with each minute. The thunder

rolled discontentedly in the near distance, until finally the rains sparkled down like manna on the land. And for both the earth and Erin, there was peace at last.

Melissa Lewis

The English Club Names Dr. Ben Harold Douglas to Literary Hall of Fame

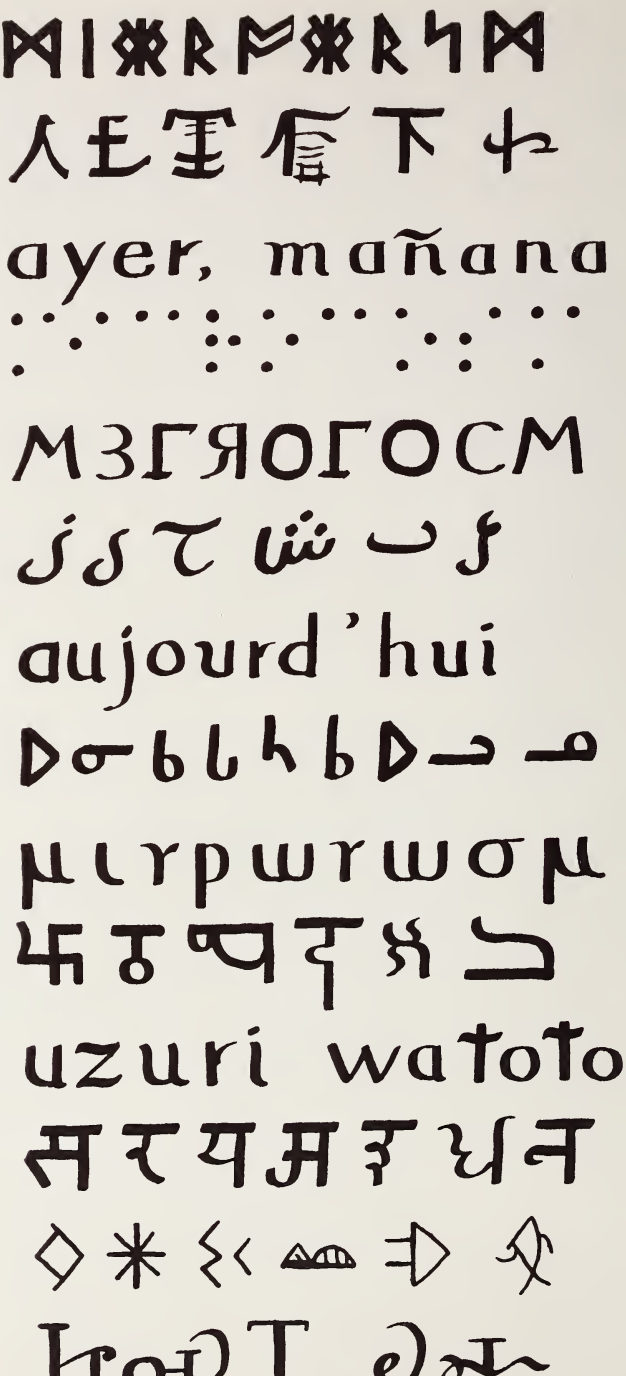


Many people believe writing is confined to creative writing to the genres of poetry, drama, short story, or the novel. Others may believe writing occurs only in the English classroom. Yet, writing is not only important for aesthetic reasons, but also for expanding our knowledge of subject matter. We are fortunate that some who have knowledge in areas like law, science, theology, or medicine are writers willing to share their knowledge and understanding, giving us a better insight into their worlds.

Writing is a tool which we can hone to our special style to express our ideas, beliefs and knowledge. It is through this tool that Dr. Ben Harold Douglas expresses his ideas and knowledge of medicine.

The **Microcosm** staff extends congratulations to Dr. Douglas, the 1986 recipient of the Copiah-Lincoln Junior College Literary Hall of Fame Award. Dr. Douglas, whose professional articles, books, and pamphlets have been published nationally, believes that writing is important to people in all professions. He states, "Virtually all businesses, professions and occupations can benefit from ideas. Unfortunately, ideas, concepts or information which cannot be communicated to others are essentially useless. It follows then that the ability to express thoughts with effective writing is of paramount importance to those who expect to make a lasting contribution to their chosen profession."

Dr. Douglas, a student at Copiah-Lincoln in the 1950's, is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies, Professor of Anatomy, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Associate Professor of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Dr. Douglas taught physics at Copiah-Lincoln from 1957-1960.


ayer, mañana
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uzuri watoto

The Heroic Ideal in Beowulf

The great long poem **Beowulf** is a piece of literature that overflows with the Old English "heroic ideal." The heroic ideal itself is one of excellence. It is a perception of flawlessness and of absolue perfection. In this poem, Beowulf is the heroic figure. He lives up to all expectations with his inhuman grip and excellent swimming ability, his uncanny boasts, and his glorious death. The whole poem appears to be based on Beowulf manifested as the heroic ideal.

The poem begins by giving the reader some background information about Hrothgar and about Grendel's attacks. This sets the scene for the heroic deeds that the reader will discover as Beowulf becomes involved. Beowulf comes into the story when he makes the request of Hrothgar to come and dispose of Grendel and his attacks.

One of Beowulf's heroic characteristics is recognized when he fights with Grendel in the Mead Hall. Beowulf has an inhuman grip that he uses against Grendel. This grip beings Beowulf to victory over Grendel and is a perfect example of the heroic ideal. Beowulf's grip was so extraordinary, proving him to be the best man to challenge Grendel. Beowulf defeats Grendel and indeed proves that he is superior.

Beowulf's second quality is presented when he swims to the bottom of a lake to fight Grendel's mother, who proves to be a bigger problem than Grendel. Beowulf is not accompanied by any of his men, and yet he defeats Grendel's mother in her home. This is a second characteristic that proves his excellence.

Another heroic attribute is one of boasting. Throughout the story, Beowulf makes incredible boasts both before a confrontation with the enemy and after such a confrontation. These boasts appear pompous to readers today, but they are not at all meant to be. The boasts are simply expected and carried out by heroes such as Beowulf. This is another characteristic of the heroic ideal Beowulf proves to possess.

A third and final heroic characteristic is one of dying gloriously. The ability to recognize one's fate and accept it was important to Beowulf. He realized that his fight with the dragon was truly his last. He fought as hard as he could and died gloriously and honorably. Even though he did die in the struggle, he died in an attempt to save his people from the dragon; and he succeeded. Beowulf also gained immortality in death. This accomplishment is one applicable to the heroic ideal as well.

The three heroic characteristics found in the story were lived to the fullest, and Beowulf proved to be the heroic ideal brought to life. Beowulf is truly the perfect example of the perfect hero.

Erin Singleton
Brookhaven High School
First Place, Formal Essay

Henrik Ibsen: Pioneer of Modern Drama

The middle to late nineteenth century was a time of vast cultural change. During this period, the slaves were freed in America, and the serfs were freed in Russia. New ideas were introduced by philosophers such as Marx, Engels, and Neitzche. The old, out-dated industrial system was being replaced in an industrial revolution. The time and world were right for reform.

Against this background arose Henrik Ibsen. An idealist, Ibsen used plays to criticize society. He stressed the importance of the individual and the general corruptness of society. Many of his plays contain themes dealing with social injustices. Four plays in particular contain the bulk of Ibsen's social criticism: **The Pillars of Society; The Doll House; Ghosts; An Enemy of the People.**

All people are influenced by personal experiences, other people, or a combination of both. Henrik Ibsen is no exception to this rule. Although it is impossible to determine all the factors which have influenced a person, it is possible to note those which appear to have had the most direct influence.

Ibsen's childhood experiences probably had the greatest influence on his work. He was born into a middle class family of six childen. His father, a businessman, became bankrupt when Ibsen was eight years old. The Ibsens lost everything except a small farmhouse. For the next eight years, they lived in this farmhouse, neglected and shunned by family and former friends. Because of this experience, Ibsen grew up scornful of the falseness and cruelty of the middle class.

Ibsen's childhood experiences also established in him a personal opinion of women that would surface in many of his later works. For instance, Ibsen's mother had, at one time, possessed artistic inclinations, but she was forced to abandon these dreams to accept the role of wife and mother. Ibsen saw this as a great tragedy in which a person's individuality had been sacrificed because of social conditions.

Ibsen was both a social philosopher and a playwright; accordingly, the man with the greatest influence on Ibsen's work, Gotthold Lessing, was also a social philosopher and a playwright. Although Lessing lived a century before Ibsen, many of the problems that he criticized were still present at the time of Ibsen. Lessing advised later playwrights to use the theatre as a moral testing ground. Lessing advocated new social conditions; and one-hundred years later, Ibsen questioned if these conditions had been met.

Another man influencing Ibsen was the British writer and social reformer, John Stuart Mill. In 1869, Mill published **Subjection of Women,** a book dealing with the oppression of women in society. This book was translated into Dutch by Georges Brand, and it laid the groundwork for the women's rights movement in Norway. The influences of this book on Ibsen are apparent in **The Doll House** and **Ghosts.**

To understand Ibsen's work, one must first understand Ibsen, himself. He was sort of an Anarchist or Utopian Marxist. He wanted revolution and the destruction of the state, but he probably would not have endorsed such a revolution because it would eventually have become a social revolt instead of a revolt of the individual.

Central to all of Ibsen's work is the idea of the importance of the individual. Ibsen stressed that the individual, not the group, was important. Ibsen was basically concerned with the inside of people, not the surface. He believed that the insertion of old-fashioned ideas into society would help the individual gain importance.

Ibsen generally found in society two types of men, the conformist and the nonconformist. The conformist is ruled by majority opinion and social customs. The nonconformist finds his purpose in the pursuit of his own personal truth. Because of this practice, the nonconformist isolates himself from society. The conformist, however, becomes a clone, the agent of existing institutions. In these views of the conformist and the nonconformist, Ibsen presents two options for man: adopting social customs, and fitting in, but losing individuality or following a personal code and being an outcast.

Ibsen also strongly believed in the importance of women in society. He believed that women generally cling to the truth more successfully than do men. Women, however, are oppressed by society. They are not allowed to express their views in society and thus, have no role, but they suffer from society equally as do men. They also must contend with social pressures while, at the same time, seeking the approval of their husbands. Ibsen believed that the women, because of their honesty, are the key hope for society, but only by being given rights can they accomplish anything.

The main social institution oppressing women was the family, according to Ibsen. He believed that the family was the basis for most social practices. In his plays, Ibsen revealed the weaknesses of the average family. The breakdown of the family in Ibsen's plays can be attributed to several factors: weak husbands, weak wives, a rift betwen parents and children, and boredom.

The ultimate evil in Ibsen's work is always society. Society has corrupted the individual and suppressed individual expression. Man, hoping to fit into society, must accept the rules of society: cheating partners, eliminating the competition, and playing along the rules of public authorities. In Ibsen's plays, social relationships permeate personal and family disasters. Because of the way society is set up, someone is always standing in the way of another's needs. These corrupt practices are bad enough in public life, but the pressure to conform to society also causes dishonesty and conformity in private affairs. and playing along the rules of public authorities.

Ibsen believed that the key to purifying society was truth. He believed that truth should be the goal and guiding principle in life. This truth would have to come from within each individual. He did, however, realize that the new truth which society needed could not be absolute and inappropriate to the realities of a scientific age, nor superficially positive, reducing man to no more than the passive sum, or fated victim of heredity and environment.

Ibsen offers nature as another possible cure for society. Nature symbolizes freedom and goodness in Ibsen's plays. Many of Ibsen's characters dream of nature as a counter-image to society. Ibsen believed that if man lived in nature, he would see no need for the rules of society.

Ibsen's personal philosophy is evident, not only in his social realism period, but also in several earlier works. These works provided a foundation for all of Ibsen's later plays. The first of these works was **Brand. Brand** is generally the play in which Ibsen is said to have been "set free." It served as a storage house for all Ibsen's later themes and conflicts. Following **Brand** was **The League of Youth.** In this play, Ibsen castigated local politics and, in particular, the liberal party.

Following **Brand** and **The League of Youth** were four plays which were used to criticize the falsities and deceptions on which society had been founded. These plays are Ibsen's strongest, and their influence is greater than any of his other plays. These four plays were written over a fifteen-year period, and they constitute Ibsen's social dramas.

The first of these plays was **The Pillars of Society.** It was the first work in which Ibsen set a pattern of realism and socially-oriented themes. It is inferior to his later dramas, but serves as the first statement of his commitment to realistic form and social criticism.

The next of Ibsen's social dramas, **The Doll House,** was the play in which Ibsen reached a pinnacle, both stylistically and realistically. **The Doll House** was received internationally because of its universal message. Ibsen portrayed in this work an injustice that was present in all societies. This play brought Ibsen to the forefront of international attention and established him and his work as very controversial subjects.

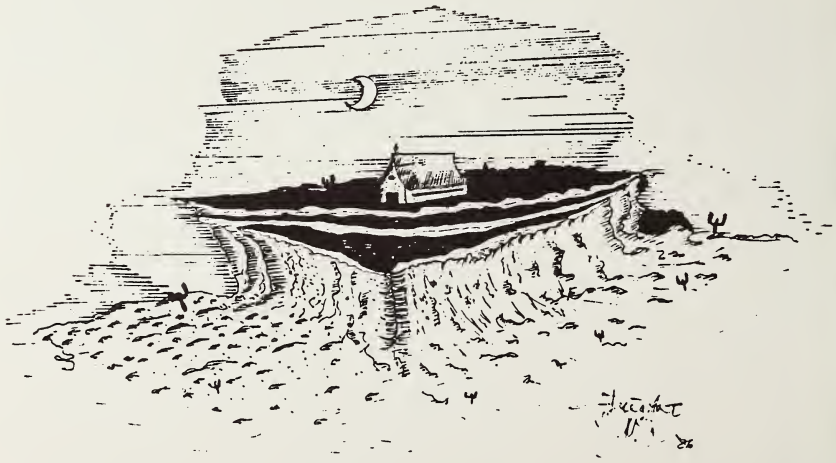
In the wake of **The Doll House** was **Ghosts. Ghosts** was introduced two years after **The Doll House. Ghosts** is very much like **The Doll House** in message and style, but it achieved an even greater disruption in society than did **The Doll House.** It was banned in many places and had to be revised and edited in others.

After the very controversial **Ghosts,** Ibsen was strengthened in his feelings of the wrongness of majority. He wrote **An Enemy of the People,** the last of his social criticism plays, to further jolt the majority from their sense of righteousness. This is Ibsen's last drama of a totally social nature, and it seems to transmit Ibsen's disillusionment with a society refusing to allow itself to be helped.

Ibsen's work is a direct reflection of his nature. Underlying all of his work is a unique personal philosophy encompassing many ideas. Using these ideas and taking Ibsen's plays as a whole and not individually, the reader can identify one main theme: the importance of the individual. Diverging from this central theme is the criticism of the oppression of women, the corruption of society, and the cruelty and ignorance of the majority.

By implementing these liberal themes into drama, Ibsen changed the face of modern theatre. His influence can be seen in the works of many later playwrights—most notably, George Bernard Shaw. Ibsen's impact on social conditions, especially women's rights, is immeasurable. He helped make the theatre not only a place of entertainment but also a place of learning, a place where evil could be exposed. He, like Lessing before him, set a mandate for social change and challenged future playwrights to use the theatre as a social testing ground.

Art Kergosien
Brookhaven High School
Second Place, Formal Essay



And The Gavel Fell

Having members of my family convicted of a felony has greatly changed my life. It has also changed my outlook on life and people.

"Guilty" to most people is just a six-letter word with no personal meaning. To me it means a dramatic change in my life and the lives around me. That small, six-letter word suddenly becomes quite large.

It is nearly impossible to describe the feeling of sitting in a courtroom listening to a pious judge sentence your father to Parchman. I remember thinking, "Oh my God, a maximum-security prison," and all the horror stories briefly filled my mind.

As hard as it was to hear my father's sentence, the one placed on my grandfather numbed me: ". . . report here on June 11, for transportation to Parchman to begin serving your time." That statement will ring on and on in my memory.

Through the entire trial the family was like a person walking a tight-rope without a net. We were tense with each other but we also knew that the support was there for the asking. No one could understand why this was happening to us.

In my house the faith in God that had always been slightly below the surface became more apparent. "God has a plan for us . . . There is a reason for this," became common phrases. We questioned God but our faith was always there. The hymn "By and By" seemed to fit our lives perfectly.

However, on May 22, 1985, it seemed all our prayers and faith had been in vain. The jury returned a guilty verdict for all members involved. It was past eleven o'clock at night; we had been in court for three days. The judge had held our lives hostage.

Looking back on the trial and post-trial events, I have mixed feelings. I still don't understand why and doubt if I ever will. I don't trust people as I used to. Meeting new people and wondering if they were "for us" or "against us" is a burden I don't feel I should have to bear. Changing schools my senior year, as I have done, was never even a faint glimmer in my mind, until the trial.

I have learned to hold my head up and be proud of who I am. I have always been slightly stubborn and now, for better or worse, I have added defiance to my make-up.

Living through the court experience has made me realize how much I love my family. One of the hardest things for me to see was what happened to my grandfather. He grew years older before my eyes and there was nothing I could do. My father shut us out at times when we desperately wanted to be let in.

It has been almost six months since the day that quite literally changed my life. Things are better now. My grandfather and father are not in Parchman. Our case is on appeal although the Supreme Court has delayed ruling for one to two years. My family is stronger and my faith in God has strengthened. He has seen me this far; He will see me to the end.

Lynda A. Hood
Copiah Academy
First Place, Informal Essay

Another God

As man progressed throughout the ages he was always looking for some type of divine guidance. God was always the true divine figure, but people from the earliest of times have looked for a god who gives in to their own wishes, one who could seemingly take them through the toughest times of their lives, one who could offer false hope at any time of the day, one who was popular and socially acceptable, and one who would be the center of their unfullfilled lives.

Today's society has such a god. It meets the above criteria, and if one held religious services to honor it, this would be the opening prayer:

Our most divine and honorable liquid, we come to you to beg your drunken stupor upon us. Make us forget all the things in life that we can not bear. Give us false hope so we can fool ourselves and our friends. Let us show you in our lives, so we can be with the in crowd. Give us the ability to look and act stupid for no reason at all. Give us an open mind, so we can make up lies to impress our friends.

Oh, earthly Alcohol, you are so great. Your presence is everywhere. Your aluminum and glass temples glitter in the ditches of our highways. We depend on you for all that you can offer. You make us forget the important things in life. You help us show disregard for everyone but ourselves. You truly control our lives with your power. Your many forms stock the shelves of our stores. We go through anything to have you. We lie to our parents, we work like dogs for money to possess you, and we fake I.D.'s to obtain your presence.

Oh, Bud, why must you be so cruel to us when we leave your presence? Must we stay under your power to avoid the pain? - - - But we thank you anyway for all that you have done to destroy our lives. Protect us from all our insecurities. In Booze's name we pray . . . Cheers!

James Paul McInnis
Wesson High School
Second Place, Informal Essay

Heaven or Hell?

There lived a lad near London town
Of the finest British stock;
He was six feet tall, weighed fourteen stone -
He was solid as a rock.

This boy was richly blessed by God
With good health and good looks;
And many a talent did he possess,
Nor had he trouble with books.

But alas, the young man's heart was set
On a pretty, young Irish girl,
A damsel for whom he'd have given his soul
And everything else in the world.

One day the youth approached the maid
And endeavor'd then to speak,
But scarce had he uttered a single word
'Ere she slapped him on the cheek!

He shivered and shook, his eyes grew large,
His face turned the color of blood,
Then without a word he spun on his heel
And ran to a nearby wood.

He stopped at a place where he oft' went
Where all his dark secrets were kept,
And he burned with rage within himself
Though fain would he have wept.

He simmered and seethed with hate inside
That went right down to his marrow,
Then the murderous lad took his knife to a bush
And fashioned a bow and arrow.

When he found the lass she was all alone,
Strolling over the mead.
He could have killed her quickly with one shot,
But he was wont to see her bleed.

As he watched her humors drain away,
He was strangely drawn to save her;
But he fled instead, for the slain girl's screams
Alerted many a neighbor.

He ran from the world and lived his life
In forest, moor, and heath;
And nary a stone adorned his grave,
And nary a funeral wreath.

The young man rose to paradise,
A reward undeserved and unearned;
Yet the damsel he slew straightway sank to hell,
Where she ever since has burned.

O learned men, do ponder this:
Why has the lad not burned?
And why has heaven not opened its doors
To the lass by whom he was spurned?

Kent Lewis
Copiah Academy
First Place, Poetry

"A Romantic Evening"

Shiny silverware flashes through dull light
People strain chattering and mumbling
against the clinking of dishes.
Elegant smells, the hearty stimulation
of mouthwatering
rich
crispy
CRUNCH

It's an expensive restaurant

Laconny D. Loyd
Crystal Springs Attendance Center
Second Place, Poetry

Space Shuttles

Space
Pulls on
Americans
Causing them to dream on about the eternity of space
Even though we once thought it impossible to break the
Sound barrier, We can now travel great distances soaring
High into the unlimited blueness of the sky flying around
Until Mother Earth calls,
Telling her little babies
That they shouldn't go
Leaping far away and
Enjoy their lives
Stuck to the soil.

James Paul McInnis
Wesson Attendance Center
Third Place, Poetry

The Power of Love

The clang-clang of the old cow bell over the door got my attention as I was feeding the ninety-five cent yellow goldfish in the big tank at the end of the check-out counter. I smiled as I snapped the lid shut on the can of fish food. I was smiling because this would be my first customer in two days. Business was low, and the bills were high. I needed some paying customers.

As I turned around to see who my most welcome customer was, I was expecting an adult; but the small boy in the ragged and worn clothes who was hunched over the puppies' cage was a surprise.

Down in my heart I was upset; I had hoped for a paying customer. I figured that the only thing this little boy would want to do was look and not buy. From the looks of his clothes, I didn't think he would have the money to buy anything.

As I watched him admire the little puppies, I figured I would still be friendly and maybe let him play with one of them.

After a few seconds the little boy turned around, and I recognized him. He was the little boy in the ragged clothes whom I had seen staring at the puppies from the front display window for the last week. He'd never come into the store. He only stood outside and pressed his little face up against the window and with big brown eyes he watched the little puppies roll around and play with each other.

Today he had an oversized flannel cap pulled down over his tousled brown hair, and his big brown eyes had a bright glow to them that I had never noticed before. I also noticed in his right hand, which was usually empty, he clutched an old red flannel sock tied in a knot at the top.

When he looked up into my face with his big brown eyes, he stared at me for a few seconds, and then in a quiet nervous-sounding voice, he spoke.

"S'use me, mister, but are you the owner of this pet shop?"

I realized he couldn't be over eight years old, so he couldn't read my apron that had "ABRAMS PET SHOP" written in bold red letters across the front. I responded with a chuckle, "Yes, I am the owner. Can I help you?"

Suddenly the little boy's entire face lit up as he smiled. I noticed that he was missing his two front teeth. He held the old sock up to me. I figured he wanted me to have it, but why is what puzzled me. When I reached for the sock, it rattled. I realized it had money in it.

It wasn't very heavy so I didn't figure it had very much money in it. I decided to ask him what he wanted to buy. "Son, you look like you've saved up your money to buy something from me. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what do you want to buy?" I figured that since he didn't have much money he'd want a cheap fish if anything, so I turned and started to walk towards the fish tank. He didn't follow me but remained beside the puppies' cage.

"Mister, I want to buy a puppy."

When I turned to look at him, he was still standing beside the puppies' cage. He hadn't moved an inch. I held the old sock up and shook it. The puppies were two dollars, and it didn't sound as if it had two dollars tied up in it.

"Son, the puppies are two dollars, do you have that much in your sock?"

"Yes, sir. Me and my daddy counted it last night. He said I had two dollars on the dot."

I believed he was telling me the truth; he didn't seem to be a bad kid. So I decided to let him pick out a puppy. Even if he didn't have exactly two dollars a few cents wouldn't hurt. The puppies were mutts anyway.

"O.K., son, there are four puppies in the cage. Two of them are boys and . . ."

"S'cuse me mister, but there are five in the cage, and I want that one." He was pointing to a little solid black puppy that was huddled up in the corner of the cage.

When I looked a little closer, I realized the puppy he wanted was a little crippled one that I had planned to take to Mr. Jones, the vet. I couldn't let him spend his money on that little crippled, worthless dog.

"Son, that little puppy is crippled and can't walk. I'm going to have to have him put to sleep." I pointed to another one that was rolling around with a little ball. It was brown with a big black spot in the center of its back. "Look, son, that one seems to be a playful one. He'd make you a great pet. You'd be able to run and play with that one."

The little boy looked at me and shook his head. "But I want that one in the corner. I have saved all my money to buy that one." Once again he pointed to the little black one that was huddled in the corner.

"Son, that little puppy is crippled. He can't walk. You'd never be able to run and play with him. Don't you see that he's worthless and no good, he's crippled."

When I said this, the little boy's eyes filled with tears. But even though there were tears in his eyes, he still had that same toothless grin on his face.

"Mister, that's what the doctor told my mama when I was born." I was puzzled at what the little boy had just said, but he reached down and pulled the ragged pants legs up to reveal two crippled legs encased in metal braces. "Mister, don't you know what love can do?" He turned once again to the puppies' cage and pointed to the little crippled puppy in the corner. "I want that one."

For a few seconds I was speechless. I didn't know what to say. He really wanted the crippled puppy. "Son, do you want me to put him in a box for you?"

"No, sir. I want to carry him in my arms."

"O.K. do you want to get him out of the cage?"

The little boy clapped his hands together in excitement. His toothless grin grew even larger. "Yes, sir, can I do that?"

"Sure, go ahead."

He walked slowly over to the corner of the pen and bent over it. For a few seconds he just looked at the puppy, and then he slowly reached over and gently scratched the quivering puppy behind its ears.

The little puppy came to life like I had never seen it before. For the first time ever, its little tail was wagging from side to side crazily, and it was yelping with excitement.

I was now ashamed at myself for all the other times that I had scratched the other little puppies behind the ears and ignored the one in the corner.

As the boy picked the puppy up, I also realized that this puppy would probably give the boy more joy than any of the other lively puppies in the cage.

When he had the little squirming puppy in his arms he turned to me and smiled. "Thank you, mister." Upon saying this, he turned and started to leave the store. I hurried over to the door and held it open for him. When he stepped out the door and onto the sidewalk I remembered his sock full of money.

I didn't have to think about it. I was going to have the puppy put to sleep free, so why should I make the boy pay when he needed the money more than I did.

"Son, here. I want you to keep your money. You can have the puppy as a gift." He looked a little puzzled when I handed him the sock, but he eagerly reached out and took it from me. "Save it, and maybe one day with all the love you're going to give him, he'll be able to walk. Then you can use the money to buy him a leash."

He gave me one last grin. "Thank you, mister."

I didn't immediately go back into my store when he left. I stood on the sidewalk and watched the boy and his new friend. That little crippled boy and his new puppy had taught me a lesson in the power of love I was sure I'd never forget.

Shirley Wallace
Brookhaven High School
First Place, Short Story

The Middy Blouse

Alice, Kate, and Helen woke up filled with excitement. They were at their grandmother's house. They loved visiting Mer. There was always something fun to do at her house. They ran happily downstairs.

"Mer, Mer, what are we going to do today?" asked Alice.

"Well, Alice, I'm going to bake a pound cake. Why don't you girls run up to the attic and play dress up?"

"Oh, let's do that," said Helen. "That sounds like fun."

The girls ran up to the third-floor attic, a large room with open rafters, a wonderful place for three little girls to play. At one end of the attic was a large trunk, filled with old dresses, hats and scarves which had been worn by the ladies in the family. Alice, Kate, and Helen played happily for about an hour. They imagined themselves as princesses going to a ball.

Suddenly Kate had an idea. "Why don't we have a play?" she said. "We can do **Rapunzel**. One of us can be Rapunzel, and we need someone to be the witch and the prince."

"That's a wonderful idea," answered Helen. "I want to be Rapunzel."

"Wait," said Alice, "I want to be Rapunzel."

"That isn't fair," said Kate. "The play was my idea. I should be Rapunzel."

Her remarks brought howls of disapproval from her cousins. Finally Kate, almost in tears, said, "I'm going downstairs to Mer. She'll know I should be Rapunzel." She ran downstairs followed by Helen and Alice.

They found their grandmother in the kitchen. "Have you girls been having fun? What was all that noise I heard a second ago?" she asked.

"Oh, Mer, we were going to have a play. Alice and Helen didn't think I should be Rapunzel even though it was my idea," said Kate.

"Now, girls, the pound cake is just out of the oven. Sit down and have a slice and a glass of milk," said Mer. Their quarrel forgotten, the girls ran to the table and sat down.

"Tell us a story, Mer," said Helen after they had begun to eat the pound cake.

"Well, let's see," said Mer. "Once upon a time in the hills of north Mississippi, not far from here, a little girl lived on a farm in a white frame house. There were chickens, ducks, and horses on the farm for the little girl to play with."

"What was the little girl's name?" interrupted Kate.

"It was Alice," said Mer.

"That's my name, and it's yours too, Mer," said Alice.

"That's right. Now let's get back to the story. Alice's mother had died when she was just a baby. Her father had married again. Alice's stepmother was mean to her."

"That's like Cinderella," said Kate.

"Did this girl have a fairy godmother like Cinderella did?" asked Helen.

"You'll have to wait and see," said Mer. "In Alice's school children of all ages went to school together in one big room. This is called a one-room school house. The children were taught by the Presbyterian preacher.

"The fall that Alice was ten years old all the girls in school were wearing middy blouses."

"What is a middy blouse?" asked Alice.

"It's like what you call a sailor top. Little girls wore them out over their skirts. All of Alice's friends had one. Alice wanted one very much. She went to her stepmother and asked her if she would buy her one, but her stepmother wouldn't. She said that Alice didn't need any new clothes.

"Alice went down the road to see Aunt Frances, an old black woman, who washed the clothes of Alice's family. Alice loved Aunt Frances very much and always told her troubles to her. Today Alice told Aunt Frances that she was the only girl at school who didn't have a middy blouse. Aunt Frances told Alice that she was very sorry, but she didn't know anything to do about the problem. She gave Alice a fresh slice of pound cake and told her to run on home.

"After Alice had left, Aunt Frances began to think. She was always sad when Alice was worried about something. She had a few silver dollars which Alice's mother had given her many years before. Aunt Frances decided to use that money to buy Alice a middy blouse. She got out the **Sears and Roebuck Catalog** and ordered a beautiful white middy blouse with a blue tie.

"The blouse came the next week. When Aunt Frances gave it to Alice, Alice was very excited. She hugged Aunt Frances and told her she would wear it the very next day to school. And that's the end of the story, girls."

"That was a wonderful story, Mer!" exclaimed Kate.

"Aunt Frances was like Cinderella's fairy godmother," said Helen.

"Can we go outside and play now?" asked Alice.

"Of course, girls," said Mer.

After the girls had gone outside, Mer sighed and smiled as she thought about the carefully folded middy blouse, slightly yellowed by age, lying in a corner of the very trunk that held the dress-up clothes.

Sarah Armstrong
Copiah Academy
Second Place, Short Story

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Short Story: Amy McCraven, Brookhaven High School, "Selected Moments from Allyson Sue Farnsworth's Junior Year," Third Place

Informal Essay: Amy McCraven, Brookhaven High School, "Games People Play," Third Place; Kim Weathersby, Brookhaven High School, "Fond Memories," Honorable Mention

Formal Essay: Tammy Griffin, Brookhaven High School, "Explication of John Donnne's 'Sonnet 10,' " Third Place

Poetry: Tricia Sherman, New Hebron High School, "Knight and the Fool," Honorable Mention; Sandra McDaniel, Brookhaven High School, "Struggles," Honorable Mention